THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY IN JOHN UPDIKE'S RABBIT NOVELS

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My Parents

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This is to certify that Miss. Nazish Khan's thesis for the award of Ph.D. Degree entitled 'The Problem of Identity in John Updike's Rabbit Novels' is a product of her own research into the subject done under my supervision.

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

John Updike remarked in a 1968 interview that 'nothing that happens to us (novelists) after the age of twenty is as free from self-consciousness, because by then we have the vocation to write -- writer's lives break into two halves. At the point you get your writerly vocation you diminish your receptivity to experience'.[1] In a 1974 address he returned to this conviction and elaborated upon it by saying:

A writer begins with his personal truth, with that obscure and vulnerable and, once lost, previous life that he lived before becoming a writer : but those first impressions discharged - a process of years - he finds himself though empty, still posed in the role of a writer, with it may be an expectant audience of sorts and a certain habit of communion. It is, then that he dies as a writer, by resubmitting his ego, as it were to fresh drafts of experience and refined operations of his mind. To remain interested of American novelists, only Henry James continued in old age to advance his art, most indeed, wrote their best novels first, or virtually first. Energy ebbs as we live ... almost alone the writer can reap profit from his loss.[2]

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1. Samuels, C.T., **The Art of Fiction XLIII: John Updike**, *The Paris Review*, 12 (Winter, 1968), p. 94.
2. Updike John, *Picked up Pieces*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1975, pp. 38-39.

Updike's remarks resonate with a personal ring, for a retrospective look at his writing career discloses his career broken into two halves. Updike now has been a professional writer for more than four decades. His first decade's work mostly records the strife, observation and feeling of a pre-twenty young man whose nostalgic recollections of boyhood are transmuted by an adults' imagination and youthful biography is altered into art. In his Foreward to *Olinger Stories* 1964, he characterised his early stories as 'crystallizations of memory', a most apt description of stories collected in *The Same Door* (1959) and *Pigeon Feathers* (1962) collections. But it is also an important designation for his novels, not only for the most obviously autobiographical *The Centaur* (1963) and *Of the Farm* (1965) but even for the futuristic *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959) and others. As he later remarks, "I was full of Pennsylvania thing I wanted to say"[3] and it is evident that the Pennsylvania thing of his youthful memory informs almost all the fiction of 1955-65 decade.

The Olinger of Updike's stories is evidently the Shillington, Pennsylvania, where Updike himself grew up. Some of the early short stories during this period

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3. Quoted from *Studies in Short Fiction*, 16; 3, 1979, p. 220.

figure a young boy as the protagonist who is, in fact, an alter ego of Updike himself. Like Peter Caldwell's father in *The Centaur* Updike's father too was a High School teacher and Updike himself, as one can guess from his stories, was the brightest boy in the local high school. From the age of twelve, he had a strong ambition to be on the staff of the *The New Yorker* Magazine. His aspirations were constantly encouraged by his mother, who was herself an aspiring writer. Updike's aspirations were rewarded when he got a scholarship for Harvard from where he graduated Summa cum Laude in English literature. During his graduation he got an opportunity to be on the Editorial Board of Harvard Lampoon to which he contributed frequently as a cartoonist. He had not yet given up his early ambition that he shared with Peter to become a painter, and after Harvard, he spent a year at the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in London on a Knox scholarship. In 1955, he came back to New York and embarked upon his literary career with "Friends from Philadelphia", the first story that he sold to *The New Yorker* in 1955. He worked with *The New Yorker* for two years doing pieces for "The Talk of the town" column as well as writing short stories and poems. In April 1957, he left *The New Yorker* to write full time and moved to Ipswich, Massachusetts.

Aware of the tendency among some critics to dismiss *The Centaur* and many of his short stories as little more than surrogated glimpses of the past, Updike defends it as an honoured tradition in American tradition. "I'm still running on energy laid down in childhood .... I really don't think I'm alone among writers in caring about what they experienced in the first 18 years of their life. Hemingway cherished the Michigan stories out of proportion, I would think to their merit. Look at Twain, Look at Joyce. Nothing that happens to us after twenty is as free from self consciousness because by then we have the vocation to write.[4]

One key to *The Centaur*, however, is not the reverie of childhood but homage to the parent. Updike's belief in the mystery of the quotidian, in the always surprising variety of the everyday life explains his preference for verisimilitude in art. A child of the Great Depression, Updike is aware of what he calls 'the despair of the daily'. 'One suspects ... that it's good to be alive, that there is much more beauty around us than we ever notice, that existence is charged with goodness. Yet even though one isn't willing to die, life still, day by day, often seems

4. Howard. Jane, **Can a Nice Novelist Finish First**? *Life*, 4 Nov 66, p. 82 and Samuels, C.T. "The Art of Fiction", XLIII ; John Updike", p. 94.

monotonous and long'.[5]

Updike's father Wesley Updike had to live the long monotony. Forced into high school teaching by the economic distress of the Depression, he nevertheless, held his family together inspite of the despair of every day and his conviction that he was unsuited for the special demands that Public Schools place on their teachers. One result was that the son watched the father resolve to live even though he sensed the shrinking of his spirit and the deterioration of his body. One of the reasons for Updike's workman like habits, given by himself, is the example of his father, who despite his hardwork could not earn enough for his family. The reason Updike leads a strictly measured life is that perhaps unconsciously he fears a return to the bad old days.

Time and again Updike mentions his father's suffering during the years that frame the novel. 'The main motive force behind *The Centaur* would be some wish to make record of my father. There was the whole sense of having for fifteen years watched a normal; good doing Protestant man suffering in a kind of comic but real way'.[6] And '*The Centaur* was to some extent

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5. Howard, p. 76.

6. Rhode Eric **Grabbing Dilemmas**, *Vogue*, 1st Feb 71, p. 84.

motivated by the idea that my father was an economic victim and more specifically that Public High School was a kind of baby sitting service in which people at their most vital were caged with these underpaid keepers of which he was one; so there was some social idea that went with my psychological impression of him as a suffering man.'[7] Updike realised that one way to tell his father's tale was to view it from the perspective of classical myth, especially the Chiron version of the Hercules saga which is one of the few classic instances of self-sacrifice. Updike has written about the same figure in shorter, more conventional ways, for example in the short stories *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and So Forth*,[8] *Home*[9] and the poem *Leaving Church Early*[10] but none has the imaginative richness of *The Centaur*.

Updike's another important autobiographical novel *Of the Farm* seems to be a sequel to *The Centaur*. The homage in this novel is to the mother and the son is here called Joey Robinson. Quite like Updike's ambitious mother, Joey's mother, now

7. Burgin Richard, **A Conversation with John Updike**, *The John Updike Newsletter*, 10 & 11 (Spring & Summer) 1979, p. 7.

8. Updike John, *The Same Door*, New York, Knopf, 1958.

9. Updike, John, *Pigeon Feathers*, New York, Knopf., 1962.

10. Updike John, *Tossing and Turning*, New York, Knopf., 1977.

widowed, had wanted him to be a poet, but his talent and his Harvard education have led him only to a job as a specialist in advertising dollar distribution. Although, his own father is dead, Joey's memories of him indicate that the myth of *The Centaur* reverberates in this tale too. Updike has himself acknowledged the connection between his autobiography and the novels *The Centaur* and *Of the Farm*, thus he indirectly supports the suggestion that Joey has taken up Peter's pen. 'I suppose there's no avoiding it - my adolescence seemed, interesting to me. In a sense my mother and father, considerable actors both, were dramatising my youth as I was having it so that I arrived as an adult with some burden of material already half formed. There is true, a submerged thread connecting certain of the fictions and I guess the submerged thread is the autobiography---- *Of the Farm* was in part a look at the world of *The Centaur* after the centaur had indeed died'.[11]

By comparing Updike's interviews with his fiction and stories, we find that much of his fiction is thinly disguised autobiography. Whether we read them in *The Centaur* or in *The Dogwood Tree (A Boyhood reminiscence)*, *Assorted Prose*, whether the hero is

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11. *Picked-up Pieces*, p. 497.

called Allen Dow, Clyde Behn or John Updike, the facts are always the same. The 'genius' of his mother, Updike has written, 'was to give people closest to her mythic immensity'.[12] Similarly Updike uses his family to construct a myth of parents and children.

Updike wrote the Foreword to *Olinger Stories* in 1964 with the intention of saying farewell to Pennsylvania and to his boyhood memories. After the novel *Of the Farm*, his favourite fictional locale moves from Pennsylvania to New England and his themes no longer reflect boyhood recollections but adult conerns. In the decade 1965-76 the tensions of marriage, the process of dying, and the varied loses of faith-religious, political, sexual became his central themes. However, he himself observed that 'the differrence between Olinger and Tarbox is much more than the difference between childhood and adulthood than the difference between two geographical locations. They are stages on my pilgrim's progress not dots on a map.'[13]

The years 1964-66, therefore, mark an important transitional stage in Updike's progress and so are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of his

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12. Samuel, C.T. *John Updike, Pamphlets on American writers*, No. 79, University of Minnesota Press, Minnespolis, 1969, p. 12.

13. *The Paris Review*, pp. 90-91.

writing career. *The Music School* collection holds a distinctive place in Updike's writings because it contains several stories that in addition to more familiar Updike themes, deal with the issues of artistic self-consciousness and the act of composition itself. In the story *The Bulgarian Poetess*, published in March 1965, Updike created a spokesman who would explicitly engage these issues, Henry Bech. Later these stories were compiled and published in book form, *Bech : A Book* and later in a second series,*Bech Is Back* and recently in a third volume *Bech At Bay*. Of these stories, Updike said, "... at any rate, I have used the writer in *Bech : A Book* as a subject in order to confess sterility in a truthful way.... In my book, I tried to -- and I believe I did package and dispose of a certain set of tensions and anxieties which I have as a practising writer.'[14] Updike not only transmuted his own anxieties as a writer through Bech but also found an outlet for his experience of visiting Russia, Bulgaria and Romania.

Midpoint, though a lesser known work, is another milestone in Updike's career in which he sets forth his outlook on life and art. In 1968, having first passed his thirty fifth year, the midpoint of the traditional

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14. Gado. Frand, ed. *First Person Conversations on Writers and Writing*, Union College Press, Schenectady, New York, 1973, p. 83.

Biblical span of three score years and ten, John Updike undertook the writing of a long poem which would evaluate his life and set forth the framework in which he envisioned to live and write. The poem was largely ignored when it was published and has received little attention since. Nevertheless, the poem has a serious purpose despite its seemingly light and satiric tone and deserves attention as a central document in a consideration of Updike's development as a writer. In an interview first published in 1972, Updike said, 'when asked about what my philosophy was, I tried to write it down in *Midpoint*....'[15] The philosophical and theological concerns, which are an integral part of the poem, offer an insight into the underlying intent of Updike's novels from *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959) to *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996). The commitments Updike sets forth in his poem provide the screens through which we may sift the complexities of his seventeen novels. Throughout the five cantos Updike reveals that he is committed to the centrality of the reality of the material world, and a life of mystery and faith. In the poem, he clearly aligns himself to the theology of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth and sings praises for them.

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15. *Picked up Pieces*, p. 509.

In Updike's less autobiographical fiction, themes from the *Olinger Stories* recur in various forms. Instead of personal nostalgia, there is a nostalgia for pre-urban America. The dominant characters in the later fiction are old men or young ones who feel at odd against the modern world. Instead of the efforts to capture one's past, there is a quest for permanence that involves religion.

The Poorhouse Fair (1959) is quite unusual for a first novel, but it has the germs of Updike's mental and spiritual concerns which were later explored in his novels especially *The Scarlet Letter* trilogy. It is set 20 years in future and is written as an anti *1984*.[16] In this novel, there is an ongoing debate between Conner, the prefect of the old age home, who in fact, stands for the humanist approach to life, and Hook, the ninety four year old protagonist who shares Updike's views on faith and spirituality. Conner represents the secularization of American life, the increasing concern with material values, an idealist dedicated to his duties and responsibilities. He enhances the physical comfort of the people, looking after their health and needs but at the same time ignoring their real need, spiritual security, which is

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16. Orwell, George, *1984*.

more important for the elderly than anything else for their attention is now focussed upon the ultimate fact of life—death, and this fact is one for which Conner's socialism has no room. Hook, however, shares with Updike his belief that there is no goodness without belief. The key to goodness is faith.

Among all his works, Updike's most celebrated work is the Rabbit tetralogy in which he has chronicled the America of the nineteen fifties, sixties, seventies and eighties. The quartet portrays the protagonist's quest for identity in an ambiguous environment. The quest is also for a set of values—religious, ethical or social that could give meaning to the flux of existence. In other words it is Updike's attempt to grapple with the problems of his own generation.

It was *Rabbit, Run* (1960), his second novel, the first of the quartet, that earned him the reputation of a novelist of his times. The novel draws heavily on the author's own personal experiences. The novel also marks the initial exploration in a fictional form of what has since become the author's characteristic use of immediate personal experience as the matrix for the works of his imagination. Published eight years before *Midpoint*, the novel clearly foreshadows the poem's concerns and commitments. The protagonist is the representative of the universal angst of modern man.

At 26, Harry is already a has been. A former high school basketball star, he finds the mediocrity of his present life compromising, hence he does what his instinct tells him to do--flees his home, his denigrating job, his dull and unintelligent wife and son. Through the rest of the novel he keeps himself on the run but discovers to his dismay that there is really no way out. The novel was, as Updike says, 'a deliberate attempt to present both the escapist, have- it- my- way will to live versus the social restraints.'[17]

Updike did not originally intend to continue the story of Harry Angstrom beyond the scope of *Rabbit, Run*, but returned to it after ten years when he realised that Rabbit was a suitable medium to pack off the angst and social conditions of the sixties. Rabbit is now a paunchy middle American, who has given in to more or less a passive existence. In *Rabbit Redux* the juxtaposition of self and the world that characterized *Rabbit, Run* is continued, but the external circumstances which intrude on Harry Angstrom in 1969 are of a scale significantly different from those he confronted in 1959. Political and philosophical apathy typified the last year of the Eisenhower era,

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17. Interview with John Updike in Campbell, Jeff H. *Updike's Novels : Thorns Spell a Word*, Wichita Falls, Texas; Midwestern State University Press; 1987, p. 295.

but the first of the Nixon years is characterized by the Vietnam war, its counter culture opponents, black militancy and the forays into the outer space through man's first successful flight to the moon. In both novels there is the immediacy of the present tense narration. This story opens on the very first day of the moon launch; and the Vietnam war, and race riots in the cities are subjects for heated debates among the characters. Harry's home is invaded by a run away hippie and a black militant. The issues of family and financial responsibility that he refused to balance against the inward reality of his own insistent ego in 1959, are still present.

Rabbit is Rich (1981) which won for Updike both the Pulitzer prize and the National Book Award, is set in the summer and fall of 1979, and the few first days of the new decade of 1980. These were the last months of Carter administration, times of long queues at gasoline pumps high inflation rates. Harry has been the manager of the Toyota Agency in Brewer since his father- in- law Fred Springer's death in 1974. The novel portrays the newly found American affluence in general. The dominant imagery is that of running out of gas. As James Wolcott finds the novel dramatically static, its basic message being, '*every thing is running*

down.'[18] Wolcott has correctly pinpointed one of Updike's important themes. On a personal level, Rabbit finds that his desires and wants have shrivelled. Also his early misconceptions of freedom have changed. The novel shows the signs of Rabbit's new found affluence. There is a shift in his priorities as well. Like an average upper middle class American, he is more concerned with his social life, is a regular member of the country club. The very things that he had found suffocating in *Rabbit, Run*, have become his routine. There is only a slight reference of his religious or spiritual concerns.

Rabbit at Rest gives the reader the vision of a man who looks out at a world in which he soon will not exist. *Rest* is death-saturated from the first scene. Physically Harry has deteriorated. Harry's physical degeneration, however, is only one sign among many of how he has been thrown back, almost without his understanding how it has happened into a solitude even more isolating than that he experienced as a young man in *Rabbit, Run*. He is semi-retired living half the year in Florida, deprived of the milieu of work and the social circle at his country club. Springer Motors is managed by Nelson, taking away from him his position of the manager, a man of importance leaving

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18. Wolcott James, **Running on Empty**. Review of *Rabbit is Rich, Esquire*, Oct. 1981, p. 20.

him with a tightly constricted identity. His social world has dissolved and he is superannuated, irrelevant, a thing of the past.

The Rabbit novels impress with the fullness of life they contain, more specifically the life of the middle class American versus his social milieu. The quartet also provides a touchstone for testing thirty years of Updike's writing.

Updike's other predominant concerns are themes of love and marriage that have occupied his interest from the beginning of his literary career. The restraints of marriage was one of the underlying themes in *Rabbit, Run* as well, but Updike was acclaimed as one of the masters of this genre with the publication and overwhelming success of *Couples* in 1968. *Marry Me: A Romance*, although published eight years after *Couples* i.e. in 1976, deals with the same theme of adulterous sex lives of young couples in their thirties. Both protagonists Jerry Conant and Piet Hanema believe in God, fear death and seek release in adultery. The reason is that the bulk of *Marry Me* was written before *Couples*. The action of *Marry Me* occupies the year from the spring of 1962, to the spring of 1963. The events of *Couples* fill the months from the spring of 1963 to the spring of 1964.

Both the novels are set in a small New England town, each is a carefully rendered sociological study of American culture of the sixties, and as Updike himself has pointed out, 'all deal with marriage in progressive states of deterioration ... and people in deteriorating states of innocence in small town Edens.'[19] *Couples* may be seen as an inversion of *Marry Me*. The adultery of one man and one woman becomes the way of life, a light hearted examination of individual human foibles is turned into a serious evaluation of social trends.

Updike's fascination with Denis de Rougemont's locating the explanation of the inescapable conflict in the west between passion and marriage in the Tristan myth is reflected in these novels. Also, as Updike said 'As in *The Poorhouse Fair*, in this novel (*Couples*) I was asking the question, 'After Christianity what?' [20] Updike in the sixties felt that a new kind of religion might be emerging, not like the rational, socially engineered welfare state posited in *The Poorhouse Fair*, but rather 'a religion of human interplay including sexual interplay.... The generation after mine seems to be attempting to find religious values in each other rather than in looking toward any supernatural or

19. Jeff Campbell, p. 159.

20. Interview, Jeff Campbell, p. 281.

transcendental entity.'[21]

Marry Me was followed by *The Witches of Eastwick* in 1984, the third of Updike's New England novels dealing with deteriorating marriages. Like its predecessors, it is set in the 1960s, and probes American culture's attempts to find a replacement for an abandoned Christianity. The novel is the first attempt by Updike to write from the point of view of female consciousness. Like Harry in the Rabbit novels, both youth and adults of Eastwick solipstically deny the outer world to seek meaning in momentary feelings. The witches, seeking to mould outer circumstances to their own inner wants. are only representatives of the culture at large.

In these novels Updike has examined a variety of attempts to find a meaningful successor to Christianity which now seems largely abandoned. To the question, "After Christianity What", the novel suggests that the attempt to find a successor to Christianity is futile.

Throughout his writing career, religious faith has been a dominant aspect of Updike's writings. In his early twenties when he was facing a religious crisis, he read such theologians as Karl Barth and Kierkegaard

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21. Ibid.

whose religious views left an indelible impression on his consciousness. Updike's love for Barth finds obvious expression in such full blown characters as The Reverend Thomas Marshfield and Professor Roger Lambert. In fact, Updike's religious views are clearly reflected in his three novels - *A Month of Sundays* (1975), *Roger's Version* (1986) and *S* (1988). The three novels constitute Updike's reworking of Hawthorn's material in *The Scarlet Letter*. *A Month of Sundays* is the Dimmesdale version, with the protagonist being a weak willed Protestant minister struggling with sensuality and a flickering faith. Marshfield is strictly a Barthian figure who refuses to attach morality with faith.

Updike's trilogy is however, not a direct reflection but a transformation of Hawthorn's masterpiece. Updike joins his predecessor in investigating adultery, sin and salvation, but the trilogy is as much a contemporary musing on Hawthorne's themes as an adaptation of the Hawthornian dilemma. Updike confirms his sympathy with Barth's argument that humanity cannot reach God, only God can touch humanity. The result is that faith always outweighs good works.

Marshfield is a minister caught between the apparently conflicting demands of stern faith and insistent eroticism. He engages himself in adulterous affairs with his parishioners. When discovered, he is sent to a rest home for disturbed clergymen, where he is suggested to write for therapy. Still he is far removed from pangs of consciousness suffered by Hawthorne's Dimmensdale. Instead it is Barth's definition of faith that sustains him during his sojourn in the desert. Confident of his belief, Marshfield unifies the material and the spiritual and emerges victorious.

Updike's position on the unimportance of ethics has its source in Barth's assurance that evil is always relative because it is not part of God's positive creation. Such an opinion does not, however, negate the necessity for faith. Bernard Schopen has given the soundest analysis of the relationship between religion and Updike's fiction. He says that the faith discussed in the novels, 'is one to which many of the assumptions about the Christian perspective do not apply, especially those which link Christian faith with an absolute and divinely ordered morality.'[22]

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22. Schopen. Bernard, **Faith, Morality and the Novels of John Updike**, *Twentieth Century Literature*, 24 Winter, 1978, p. 523.

The next novel in the trilogy *Roger's Version* (1986), portrays Roger Lambert, a dry bookish scholar, a professor of early Christian heresies, who is drawn after Hawthorne's Roger Chillingworth. The main action of the novel consists of the long discussions between Roger and a 28 year old student Dale Kohler, possessing a startling idea put as "God is breaking through". He seeks to prove His creation and His existence through advanced computer technology. With Roger's help he obtains a grant from the university to pursue his project. The clash is between two contrary thoughts - Lambert's Barthianism–God is beyond all human understanding against Dale's insistence that he is knowable and even tangible. But Roger maintains that to reveal God is to eliminate God's majesty. Dale may be a believer but his effort to reveal God's face makes him an anti Barthian heretic.

In keeping with the erudition of Chillingworth, Updike directs Roger's version with intellectual intensity. Another feature that the novel shares with Hawthorne's masterpiece is Roger's reaction on discovering Dale's affair with his wife Esther (Hester). The older man uses the relationship to irritate Dale's conscience, as Chillingworth did Dimmesdale's, preventing any open confession that might bring repentence and release to the young man.

Updike turns to Hester's version of *The Scarlet Letter* with *S : A Novel* in which he investigates rebellion from a disgusted wife's point of view. Updike's Sarah (Hester) pursues mystical eroticism with an oriental flavour. Calling attention not to Hester's artistic skills but to her sexuality, he stresses her association with the serpent in Eden when he designs the letter S on the book cover to resemble a snake.

Sarah Worth, the protagonist deserts her "dark and unheeding" philandering physician husband Charles to join an Ashram in Arizona desert. Her search is for an enlightenment beyond her highly privileged but suffocating upper middle class life. The ashram is an object of satire but soon it becomes clear that what has actually misled Sarah is another form of antinomianism-- feminism. When Hester's adultery is discovered, she retreats to a cabin in the forest and keeps silent, while Updike's Sarah travels to her ashram and speaks up. The epistolary style in *S.* gives Sarah the voice that Hawthorne denies to Hester. Unlike her predecessor, Sarah escapes with her eroticism. Both women reflect their cultures, but Sarah has the advantage of knowing that much of the society supports her rebellion. Barth's theology is not an issue in *S.*, more the dominant concern is feminism.

Updike's insistence is on the unification of body and soul, separated by the Puritans and kept asunder by Hawthorne even is his most radical transformation of *The Scarlet Letter*. Marshfield, Sarah and Roger Lambert pursue freedom to extremes because they know with Updike that Barth's formulas are apt. Since only God is perfect, humanity by definition is free to transgress. To remain human, humanity must resist God's perfection.

After *Rabbit at Rest* was pulished in 1990, Updike has written a few novels in this decade, but he is yet to make an impact. Three novels *Memories of the Ford Administration* (1991), *Brazil* (1993), *In the Beauty of the Lilies* (1996) were published, but were treated with less enthusiasm in the literary circles. *Memories of the Ford Administration*, Updike's fifteenth novel, deals with the role that eros and error have played throughout American political history. The narrator speaks about his impression of Gerald Ford's days in the White House. Alf can remember only two things -- his knot of extramarital affairs and his never completed opus on the life of President James Buchanan. The novel alternates between these two loosely related subjects. The novel also explores modern American terrain of desire. guilt and moral ambiguity that Updike has made distinctly his own.

Brazil is an offbeat subject for Updike who has, over the years, positioned his fictional worlds in varying social and geographical milieus, his most familiar being, American suburban life. The novel in its new fictional locale is similar to an earlier attempt of writing about African life in *The Coup*, which is offbeat in more than one sense. Firstly, it is unusually positioned in the imaginary African nation of Kush. Secondly, the narrator is a departure from the usual Updike point of view. He is Colonel Felix Hakim Elleloû, the black President-dictator of Kush. The novel is, infact, his memoirs that describes the events that led to the coup that displaced him in 1974. *The Coup* is unique in that it centres around events and matters of worldwide historical significance. In the other novels, the historical setting only provides a backdrop to highlight the basically personal story of the characters. *The Coup* is overtly political using the emergence of the third world nations as a vehicle for satirical attacks on the two super powers.

Brazil begins and ends on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro. The subject is a twenty two year love Odyssey of a black slumboy Tristao and Isabel, who hails from the higher circles of the society. The novel realistically portrays Brazil's teeming city streets, poor countryside and hyper inflation. As the novel progresses, Updike

takes us deep into remote forests, to Sau Paulo, Brasilia, into the mineral rich hills, so that the novel reads more like a travel book with a picaresque plot. In *Brazil* Updike seems to be writing about his own version of South America with all its enchantments.

In The Beauty of the Lilies published in 1996, is a four generation saga which is partly a fictional version of Updike's family history, partly an account of the decline of religious faith in America, and partly a reflection of Updike's own angry, personal struggle to find religious meaning. Updike told *Publisher's Weekly* that in this novel he has attempted 'to make God a character, although in ways that illuminate spiritual emptiness in American life.'[23] The Reverend Clarence Wilmot loses his faith and consequently his career in ministry. Updike also links Wilmot's loss of faith to the rise movies. He suggests that the movie industry fills the void left by an absent deity. Hollywood is the new repository of values and its stars provide the models of behaviour.

Till date, Updike has produced seventeen novels, nine collections of short stories, five volumes of essays and criticism, one play besides poetry and children's

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23. Quoted in Mall, James M., **Among the Lilies**, *Christian Century*, March 6, 1996, p. 251.

books. A brief survey of his novels reveals Updike to be a writer of diverse interests. He has tried his hands at various genres, has dealt with various themes, but the underlying thread connecting all his works is the concerns of the middle class American life. Also dominant is a strong regional element, a majority of works being set in Pennsylvania and New England. The present study seeks to study Updike's treatment of the middle class American life in the *Rabbit* Tetralogy. The *Rabbit* quartet spanning three decades, is a bildungsroman, that gives Updike an opportunity to deal with a particular character, his preferences, and the tenor of his life being influenced by the changing mores of the American society.

Chapter-1

A REVIEW OF THE CRITICAL LITERATURE

Updike's themes and his style of writing elicited a mixed response in the beginning of his literary career. His early works *The carpentered Hen, and Other Tame Creatures: Poems* (1958), *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959) and *The Same Door: Short Stories* (1959) were greeted with enthusiasm in the literary circles. His great clarity and precision of language were particularly emphasized. William Peden,[1] writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, welcomed Updike's ability (reminiscent of both Chekhov and Joyce) to discern significance in the lives of ordinary people. Amidst this general praise, however, there were complaints of weakness which prefigured attacks on Updike that became commonplace later on. Richard Gilman wrote in an otherwise favourable review of *The Poorhouse Fair*: 'occasionally, too, his book suffers from what Pascal described as the wearing effect of continuous eloquence. He would profit from knowing that it is in the spaces between images that their resonance is nurtured and maintained'[2]; and the anonymous reviewer in *Time*

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1. Peden, William, **Minor Ills That Plague The Human Heart**, *The New York Times Book Review*, 16 Aug, 1959, p.5.

2. Gilman,Richard, **A Last Assertion of Personal Being**, *Commonweal*, 6 Feb., 1959, pp. 499-500.

concluded:' unfortunately, author Updike plays his talents cool; his passion for understatement seems to rule out all passion.'[3]

The large majority of reviews of Updike's second novel *Rabbit, Run* were also favourable, although some reviewers puzzled about the writer's attitude towards the protagonist. But the charges of triviality kept on growing. Another review in *Time* said, 'This dedicated 29 year old man of letters says very little, and says it very well...The impressions left are of risks untaken, words too fondly tested, and of a security of skill that approaches smugness.'[4] Although Updike's *The Centaur* won the National Book Award for fiction, it evoked a mixed critical response. Some reviewers objected to the mythic parallel of the story as irrelevant. Norman Podhoretz, one of the determined haters of Updike's work concluded that, in general, Updike has nothing to say, and that his emotional range is very limited, confining itself primarily to nostalgic recollections of youth.'[5] Along with Podhoretz, John Aldridge and magazines like *Commentary*, kept up sustained attack on Updike for what they called lack of substance in his works.

3. **Cool, Cool World** *Time*, 17 Aug., 1959, p. 98.
4. **Put and Take**, *Time*, 16 Mar., 1962, p. 86.
5. Podhoretz, Norman, **A Dissent on Updike**, *Show*, 3 Apr. 63, 49-52.

Norman Podhoretz leads the group of critics who attack Updike for his indulgence in stylistic capers which fails to cover his lack of substance. Even sympathetic critics like Guerin La Course observed that 'He fears to foray into the night world of feeling for the significances. The polarity of genius has a double edge.' warning that 'Updike cannot afford to sit on his hands', he concluded, 'he relies, apparently, on language rather than thought, sense rather than sensibility, wit rather than wisdom all of which afford only temporary harbor.'[6]

Updike's preoccupation with diverse concerns like sociological, metaphysical and Christian led to different interpretations of his texts. Among the very early critical articles, Dean Doner's **Rabbit Angstrom's Unseen World**[7] takes into consideration short stories such as *Ace in the Hole* and *Lifeguard* and Updike's novels *The Poorhouse Fair* and *Rabbit, Run* to conclude that humanists are consistently projected as antagonists in Updike's works. For Doner, Rabbit becomes the hero victimized by the net of humanism. Eccles and Conner two humanists are the antagonists and Rabbit's irresponsible behaviour

6. La Course, Guerin **The Innocence of John Updike**, *Commonweal*, 8 Feb. 1963, pp. 512-14.

7. Doner, Dean, **Rabbit Angstrom's Unseen World** *New World Writing*, 20, 1962.

and selfish efforts for breaking free are in a sense redeemed by his belief in God. Arthur Mizener in the **American Hero as High School Boy: Peter Caldwell**[8] relates Updike's nostalgia for his past with a religious feeling. Encounters with the past become the means of preserving his sense of some sublime quality in life, and of seeing how the transcendent value of the people he loved as a child inheres in them an intrinsic blessing.

This sense of the religious in Updike is dealt with directly in Michael Novak's essay **Updike's Search for Liturgy**.[9] Novak attempts to show how the narrator in Updike's short stories searches for images of a deep and serene way of looking at life which is completely lost in contemporary secular world. He concludes that Updike is attempting to impose meaning on flux, that he is dealing with serious issues and is trying to reinforce the significance of religion in America. The idea of Updike as a religious writer is also explored in Robert Detweiler's **John Updike and the Indictment**

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8. Mizener, Arthur, **The American Hero as a High School Boy: Peter Caldwell**, *The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel*, Boston, Houghton Mufflin, 1964, pp. 247-66.

9. Novak, Michael, **Updike's Search for Liturgy**, *Commonweal*, 10 May, 1963, pp. 192-95.

of Culture-Protestantism.[10] Focussing on *Rabbit, Run*, Detweiler sees Updike fighting in the novel the same kind of problems – false moralism, a belief in progress that ignores man's sinful nature, corrupt institutions – that the neo-orthodox theologian Reinhold Neibuhr had been fighting from the 1930's. Rabbit lacks inner resources, but with proper support he could have overcome his crisis. His tragedy as a man without grace is that his crisis does not lead to redemption, yet the critic holds the failure of the community and the institutions responsible for Rabbit's failure.

In yet another article by Thaddeus Muradian,[11] memories of childhood, pain, loneliness and death are marked as Updike's major themes. The critic asserts that Updike treats death in his works as a necessary end to life which ushers in something better than life i.e. life after death. Norris Yates also speaks of religious matters in **The Doubt and Faith of John Updike**.[12] Beside these articles, two

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10. Detweiler, Robert, **John Updike and the Indictment of Culture Protestantism**, *Four Spiritual Crises in Mid Century American Fiction*, University of Florida Monographs, No. 14, pp. 14-24.

11. Muradian, Thaddeus, **The World of John Updike**, *English Journal* , 54 (1965), pp. 577-84.

12. Yates, Norris **The Doubt and Faith of John Updike**, *College English*, 26 (1965). pp. 469-74.

pamphlets also take up the question of religion in Updike's works. The first published in 1967 was by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton and the other by Charles Samuels came out in 1969. The Hamiltons' *John Updike: A critical Essay* serves as a modest introduction to their more stridently christian interpretation of Updike published in 1970. According to Hamiltons 'Updike thinks of (his characters) as musical instruments which, even though untuned, can reverberate with the sounds of eternity'.[13] On occasion, the two critics have oversimplified Updike in stressing his christian vision. Samuels[14] in his pamphlet, has no real thesis about the writer other than that his work is important and worthwhile.

The first full length study of Updike's work is *The Elements of John Updike* by Alice and Kenneth Hamilton.[15] They believe not only that Updike has everything to say but also that he says it with enormous precision and power—not through the medium of direct exposition but indirectly through

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13. Hamilton, Alice and Kenneth, *John Updike: A Critical Essay*, Grand Rapids Michigan, William Eerdmans 1970.

14. Samuels, C.T. *John Updike*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1965.

15. Hamilton, Alice and Kenneth, *The Elements of John Updike*, Grand-Rapids, Michigan, William, Eerdmans, 1967.

the medium of imagery and parable. The Hamiltons, therefore, give only scant attention to the realistic content of Updike's fiction and concentrate almost entirely on the patterns of meaning that are traceable beneath it. They find Updike demonstrating the abundance of God's grace and the unwillingness of contemporary man to accept it. They find Christian orthodoxy to be Updike's solution to the dilemmas of twentieth century life. But their position overlooks the sociological significance of Updike, as they do not want to treat literature primarily as a social document even though Updike so carefully details minutia of our ordinary experience. Their shortcoming is that their interpretation of Updike places all emphasis upon the individual's relationship with God and that too of a Christian pursuation. Through their work Updike emerges as a kind of monster symbolist and theological preacher, whose work is viewed not as literary but as a repository of religious and mythological imagery. The Hamiltons have argued aggresively that Updike has constantly dealt with the abundance of God's saving grace for those who freely accept it. Their explication of Updike rather diminishes the complexity of his characters and makes christianity sound like the only plausible theoretical understanding of human existence. It has to be acknowledged that the meaning of God has

always been a concern of Updike's works and there are also Biblical allusions but the Hamiltons' interpretation of these seems, at times, arbitrary and almost always too simple. They write, for example: 'snow from heaven, bringing to a halt earthly business, allows man to know that he is in the care of a providence ordering all things in a fashion beyond his comprehension'. But the study is not always this reductive, the Hamilions are sensitive to Updike's allusineness, not confined just to Bible or Karl Barth or Kierkegaard but also to sources as varied as Robert Herrick (about whom Updike wrote his Harvard thesis) or Pliny's *Natural History*. However, one is often compelled to object to the way in which they interpret the function of the allusions. Nevertheless, the Hamiltons hold a significant position in Updikean criticism for their poineering work.

Like the Hamiltons, George Hunt too preoccupies himself with the religious overtones of Updike's work in *John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion and Art*[16]. His thesis is that these aspects characterize the predominant subject matter, thematic concerns and central questions found throughout Updike's fiction. The focus in the early fiction

16. Hunt George, *John Updike and the Three Great Secret Things : Sex Religion and Art*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans, 1980.

is on religion, beginning with *The Music school* it is on sex, and with *A Month of Sundays,* art and the problems relating to fictional creation come to the fore. Hunt insists, 'like a musical composition . . . , these are his motives or tonic centers that, even when muted or wedded with subordinate themes, still resonate for the attentive listener'. He seeks to demonstrate that Updike has a most sophisticated religio-artistic vision, informed and often shaped by a very complex and subtle theology. Besides, Hunt shows how the ideas of such figures as Karl Barth, Soren Kierkegaard and Carl Jung can increase one's understanding of Updike's world. He shows Barth's attitude toward evil, and the relevance of this attitude to Updike's treatment of Rabbit Angstrom; Kierkegaard's ideas about dread, guilt and sin particularly as they relate to sexuality, which in Updike's estimate, according to Hunt, is not only psychologically complex but also morally and religiously ambivalent. Hunt also suggests the possible influence on Updike of the 'compellingly dramatic voices' of these theologians, as well as of their distinctive dialectical and ambiguous modes of argumentation.

In addition, Hunt seizes upon his own knowledge of Carl Jung's theories about the anima and individuation to illuminate Updike's fiction, in particular

Of the Farm and *A Month of Sundays*. Marshfield's month records a man's psychic movement from his concern with his ego-the dwelling place of his conscious life, to his encounter with the unconscious symbol of the self. Besides, Hunt refers to Karl Barth, Kierkegaard, John Bunyan, Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Denis de Rougemont, Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell and R.W.B. Lewis. In other words, he seizes upon whatever idea appeals to him to explain what he regards as the resonances of Updike's fiction.

Some critics, focussing on the religious implications of Updike's work, read his work and his concept of love and adultery in the light of Karl Barth's theology. Garry Waller's **Updike's Couples: Barthian Parable**[17] forwards the thesis that it is Karl Barth's stance of compassionate neo-orthodoxy that provides the distinctive moral backbone for *Couples*. Waller points to the novel's end and asserts, Barth's theology accepts men as they are and the novel's happy end is in keeping with Barth's view that God wills everything to be ultimately well in the apparently worst of all possible worlds. Bernard Schopen in **Faith, Morality and the**

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17. Waller, Gary, **Updike's *Couples:* A Barthian Parable,** *Research Studies,* 40: 8, 1972

Novels of John Updike[18] says that Updike's faith is christian but the christian perspectives which link faith with an absolute and divinely ordered morality do not apply to it. Schopen analyses Barth's complex theology as reviewed by Updike in *Anselm: Fides Quarrens Intellectum*;[19] since Updike believes in Barth's notion of God as 'wholly other' and determines his faith only with the profession of Apostle's Creed, it contains no inherent moral system. Therefore, he rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral principles. This factor determines much of the ambiguous attitude of Updike's protagonists who are religious and adulterous at the same time.

In **Updike's idea of Reification**,[20] Terence Doody posits the idea of reification based upon the idea of God's existence that Updike had been developing since his first novel. Doody argues that Updike believes that things are not 'nullity' but are suggestive of God, and that there is an 'immanence in things.' About the ethical questions he holds the belief that

18. Schopen, Bernard, **Faith, Morality and the Novels of John Updike,** *Twentieth Century Literature,* 24, 1978, p. 523-535.

19. Updike, John **Faith in Search of Understanding,** *Assorted Prose,* New York, Alfred Knopf, 1965.

20. Doody, Terence, **Updike's Idea of Reification**, *Contemporary Literature*, 20, 1979, pp. 204-220.

morality is a relative matter compared to the absolutes of life which are death and the physical relations of bodies to each other.

The existentialist aspects of Updikes work have been explored by David Galloway.[21] He explores the theme of the existence of an individual in a meaningless universe—a universe in which precepts of religious orthodoxy seem increasingly less relevant. Galloway views *The Poorhouse Fair* as a novel of dismissal which suggets the failure of various traditional systems to fulfill contemporary man's spiritual needs. Galloway sees Updike attacking humanism as one of the life denying impulses of the age. He views Rabbit as a saint with a vision of the absurd and the need to find a world in which he can again experience the sacredness of achievement. Rabbit, he claims, wants to comfort and heal and is selfish only in the manner of the searcher after truth. Rabbit rebels against the wasteland into which he is born and is consistently opposing the reality which he encounters. Rabbit becomes an absurd hero, and because of the highly spiritual devotion to this gesture against the world, he becomes a saint. Galloway further stresses that Updike's own

21. Galloway, David *The Absurd Hero in American Fiction*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1966.

faith is 'capricious', and he continues to explore rituals whcih sustain men in a Godless universe. In *The Centaur* too, Updike describes a world devoid of meaning. George is not claimed as a true existentialist hero by Galloway as he lacks a vision of absurdity; Peter, however, provides this awareness.

A second existentialist interpretation of Updike published around the same time is Sidney Finkelstein's *Existentialism and American Literature*.[22] In his analysis of *Rabbit, Run*, he identifies Rabbit as defeated by a life so antagonistic, so impossible to understand and therefore cope with, that his struggles are only pathetic, impotent gestures. He says that Rabbit's feeling of all encompasing alienation is not so much due to his complaints against family or conditions of life, as due to his own emptiness which conditions his alienated relations to others. According to Finkelstein, Updike sees contemporary America as a home of petrified humanity. America's bleakness is ascribed to the blind and meaningless movement of life itself. In *The Centaur*, the mythic parallels of the story are, in fact, an attempt to give the bleakness of small town America a philosophic

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22. Finkelstein, Sidney, **Acceptance of John Updike and James Purdy**: in *Extentialism and Alienation in American Literature*, New York, International Publishers, 1965, pp. 243-52.

universality, to intimate that the world has not progressed but according to Nietzchean view has merely decayed and hardened.

Howard Harper,[23] too, reads Updike as an existential novelist and around this premise builds a series of useful readings of the novels upto *Of the Farm*. He argues that in the first novel *The Poorhouse Fair* the belief in God is shown to be a spiritual necessity stronger than humanitarian illusions of the welfare state. But in the later work. God becomes increasingly vestigial, a ceremonial ideal to be invoked against the world. Harper sees Chiron as the perfect symbol for existential man, at home in neither material nor spiritual realm.

In another study, Sukhbir Singh[24] shows that Updike treats the question of man's survival in a society where God has failed, leaving man in the void of nihilism. His protagonists are always curious to feel the presence of God in their universe.

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23. Harper, Howard **John Updike and the Intrinsic Problem of Human Existence**, *Desperate Faith: A Study of Bellow, Salinger, Mailer, Baldwin and Updike*; Chapel Hill, The University of North Carrolina Press, 1967, pp. 162-90.

24. Singh, Sukhbir, *Survivor in Contemporary American Fiction: Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, John Updike and Kurt Vonnegut Jr.* New Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1991. pp-129-151.

Therefore, they make persistent efforts over the abyss of spiritual nothingness until they receive the intimation of the supernatural through the natural phenomena. He further asserts that Updike considers the impact of a man's disillusionment with life and disbelief in God on his domestic life and social existence. The characters strive for an indication of God's existence and persistently struggle for a divine morality to acheive stability and identity. While grappling with their spiritual doubts, existential anxieties and moral uncertainties, Updike's heroes initially develop the feelings of futility and meaninglessness which have disastrous effects on their lives in society.

During the late nineteen sixties and early seventies several book length studies appeared on Updike. Rachael Burchard's *John Updike: Yea Sayings*[25] traces Updike's career up to *Couples* and also attempts to prove that he has 'something to say', in this instance a serious, honest and—despite ambiguity-yea saying to the goodness of life. According to Burchard, Updike's focus is on man's search for anwsers—much of what he says is in the form of questions. He asks questions about the meaning of

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25. Burchard, Rachael, *John Updike: Yea Sayings*, Carbondale, Southern Illionis University Press, 1971.

life in our time. He seeks answers to the age old questions about man's relationship to man, the existence of God, and the relation of the individual to Him, he asks about immortality. The influences of various religious and existentiatist philosophies are evident, but none is offered as a final interpretation of life.

Larry Taylor [26] analyses Updike's central theme as pastoral and anti pastoral in our time. He focusses primarily on pastoral and anti pastoral conventions, mentioning that for the pastoral to exist, the sopisticated author's positive attitutde toward the rural setting and unsophisticated characters is crucial. The study proceeds chronologically through Updike's fiction, arguing that early in his career he tends to view pastoralism positively, whereas later on he becomes progressively more satiric and ironic in his treatment of pastoral assumptions about life. He reads *Rabbit, Run* as 'a type of fable, with satiric overtones', *The Centaur* as a pastoral elegy on the analogy of 'Lycidas', *Couples* as an indictment of pastoralism and compares Updike with the Hawthorne of ' The Maypole of Merry Mount'.—the antipastoralist who longs to be a pastoralist.

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26. Taylor, Larry, *Pastoral and Anti Pastoral Patterns in John Updike's Fiction,* Carbondale, Southern Illionis University Press, 1971.

Robert Detweiler[27] attempts to show how Updike's novels' mythic patterns relate to the modern reality. Detweiler is not only sensitive to the complexities of theme but also to the manner in which technique may inform theme and help to create it. He calls Updike's technique in *The Poorhouse Fair* as 'non-protagonist strategy' as he believes that the protagonist Hook and his adversary Conner are accented enough to project negatively the ironic theme but not adequately emphasized to dominate the novel. He is helpful in his explanation of the 'cumulation epiphany' technique in *Pigeon Feathers*, and in his analysis of the surrealistic (expansion of reality through distortion) and cubistic (simultaneous perception of many facets of personality and action) techniques in *The Centaur*, and the varieties of tone in the same novel. In his analysis of *Rabbit Redux* he says that the action is based on the imagery and is reinforced by the history. Detweiler views Updike as an experimenter in fiction, as a man who continually takes risks while writing 'secular baroques, which he defines as 'elaborate, texture conscious, structurally balanced, highly controlled, mythologically resonant fiction, yet a kind that does not celebrate such a

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27. Detweiler, Robert, *John Updike*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1972.

rich and ordered world but instead ironically marks its passing' Detweiler's thesis is flexible enough to enable him to respond to Updikes's verstality, but sufficiently firm to provide a base for his discussions.

Edward Vargo's *Rainstorms and Fire: Ritual in the Novels of John Updike*[28] is much influenced by the Hamilton's Christian reading of Updike According to Vargo, Updike tries in his fiction to visualize the transcendent through his own and sometimes his characters' sophisticated use of ritual—the various components of which are pattern, myth and celeberation. In his book, he tries to place Updike in various literary traditions, employs literary analogues, and consistently and thoughtfully attempts to parallel Updike with other writers. In his opening chapter, he establsihes analogues between Updike, J.D. Salinger and Flannery O'Connor in their shared hope for some kind of spiritual rebirth; contrasts Updike with Ken Kesey and Joseph Heller. His later pays attentiion to Updike and Trollope, to Updike and Andrew Wyeth and compares Updike and Hawthorne in their self consciousness as stylists, as writers 'who rely on ambivalent symbolism at key points in their narratives' and are also concerned

28. Vargo, Edward, *Rainstorms and Fire: Ritual in the Novels of John Updike*, Port Washington, New York, Kennikat Press, 1973.

with Puritanism in America, with the sin and guilt of their own age.

Vargo's thesis, however, adds little to what is already said about Updike; the notion of 'sacred time' in *The Poorhouse Fair,* the repetitive ritual and 'the need for celebration' in *Rabbit, Run*; the coalescing of 'pattern, myth and celebration in *The Centaur*; the notion of 'sacred place' in *Of The Farm*, and the final focus, in *Couples* and *Rabbit Redux*' upon the desperate search for ceremonies to bring wholeness into a dehumanized world. Vargo insists that Updike is continually depicting man's craving 'for the divinely or humanly transcendent' and the thrust for the rituals of Updike characters stems from the desire for life, from their fear of death. His analysis of the novels reduces them to schema: the Updike of *The Poorhouse Fair* is thus said to be a prophet; Harry's limitation in *Rabbit Run* is said to be his failure to walk the straight line of the christian paradox instead of zigzagging across his life; *The Centaur* is said to declare the existence of God in our world of spirit and matter, a central question *Of the Farm* is posed as whether belief in heaven can persist at all once man has rejected the right order in creation, Freddy Thorne and Skeeter are both said to embody psuedo

religions and so on.

Joyce Markle's *Fighters and Lovers* despite the subtitle *Theme in the Novels of John Updike*,[29] is a critical study in which form complements meaning in Updike's work, particularly in her analysis of Updike's complex imagery. The title points to her thesis that in almost all of Updike's novels there exists a protagonist with a 'vivid sense of human specialness' who fights against the pressure towards two types of death - physical and metaphorical (the death by dehumanization). Opposed to this protagonist is often a person who is well intentioned but a spiritually sterile man who fails to recognize peoples' sense of their specialness. In this study Updike is shown an dealing with essentially the same problems in each of the serious novels but as a group all demonstrate a progression of approach. The Conner-Hook conflict of the first novel is said to be taken up by the Rabbit-Eccles conflict in the second. Caldwell in *The Centaur* is said to embrace, to offer himself to that community of man that Rabbit had finally rejected. Joey is a special case who is trapped by Oedipal conflicts which restrict his own freedom

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29. Markle, Joyce, *Fighters and Lovers: Theme in the Novels of John Updike*, New York, New York University Press, 1973.

to love others, and also reflects Rabbit's and Piet's ambivalent relationships to women. The original conflicts are said to be resolved in *Couples* in which Freddy serves the function of Conner and Eccles, and Piet is like Joey and Rabbit, but finally settles down for mediocrity in the form of accepting earthly Foxy and abandons the special and angelic Angela.

Markle sees other aspects of these patterns like Updike's use of increasing and decreasing 'yes, but' conflicts , which increases with each book and the force of the moral framework decrease until *Bech: A Book*. According to her, Updike sees Chritianity as contributing to one's sense of worth, but the author's reservations about Christianity become increasingly obvious after *The Poorhouse Fair*. Markle also takes into account Updike's intricate imagery which she sees tied to his concerns as a graphic artist, as painter and cartoonist, to his vivid sense of colour, to his constant view of reality as many layered. She concludes that Updike is a self conscious artist who is tuned to the visions and neuroses of middle and upper middle class suburbanites, who brings to the fore, the responses of a generation to a Godless universe.

Suzanne Henning Uphaus[30] in her book length study on John Updike identifies the common theme behind Updike's writing as the profound religious searching that grows from a sense of despair, a quest in which doubt figures desperately with faith. There is the physical natural world in his fiction apprehended by the body through its sneses and appetites, and there is also a supernatural world apprehended by the soul, through faith. Thus, she sees Updike's characters as dichotomous creatures split between physical desires and spiritual yearning. Updike's protagonist in his desperate search for significances finds that his spirit is suffocated by the material world.

This theme of quest is taken up by Joseph Waldmeir in *Only An Occasional Rutabaga: American Fiction Since 1945*'.[31] For the critic, Updike resembles most of the best novelists since 1945 because he is a quest novelist, focussing on characters who search for value; unlike most of his contemporaries, however Updike does not give up his belief that there is some thing to find of essential, or even transcendent

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30. Uphaus, Suzanne Henning, *John Updike*, New York, Ungar, 1980.

31. Waldmeir, Joseph, **Only an Occasional Rutabaga; American Fiction Since 1945**, *Modern Fiction Studies* Vol. 15, 1969/70, pp. 467-81.

value. This assumption obstructs any tendency to turn his naturalistic or existential frame of reference into doctrine. Sex, in the quest, becomes the substitute for God and laws; sin becomes 'The failure to love strongly enough to accept responsibiltiy'. Joseph Waldmeir in *'Its The Going That's Important, Not The Getting There: Rabbit's Questing Non-Quest'*[32] concudes that Updike's real concern is a critical examinatoin of the temptations, the problems, the questions and the answers as they conflict both inside and outside the protagonist, alternatingly promising and denying solutions to the quest. It is a question of emphasis: perception and examination rather than revelation are, in fact, the theme; the quest functions primarily as a structural motif. Waldmeir very effectively delineates the stages in Rabbit's quest and shows how Updike controls the reader's involvement at each stage.

Some critics have pointed out the presence of Oedipal conflict in Updike novels. *The Politics of Reflexivity*[33] offers a psychological interpretation of

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32. Waldmeir, Joseph, **It's the Going There That's Important, Not The Getting There: Rabbit's Questing Non Quest**, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 20, 1974, pp. 13-27.

33. Siegle, Robert, *The Politics of Reflexivity*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 150-156.

Rabbit, Run. The critic contends that Rabbit's psychology of early childhood affects all his relations. The critic further says that Rabbit cannot choose freely the shape of his relations to others because of oedipal entanglements in which he has always found himself. The critic establishes his point by interpreting various incidents and imagery of the novel in this light. Jack De Bellis in *Oedipal Angstrom*[34] pursues the same theme in *Rabbit, Run*. Some other critics have also pointed out at the underlying Oedipal conflict in Updike's various novels, especially the Rabbit Quartet and *Of the Farm*.

Tony Tanner's essay *A Compromised Environment*[35] centres on his observation of Updike's fear of entropy, the basic dread in Updike's work—the fear of death, the fact of decay and the inevitable collapse into nothingness. Although dealing with the social aspect of the suburban America, his work is edged with dread. Tanner links Updike's feeling to the Darwinian demonstration that 'the organic world, for all its seemingly engineered complexity, might be

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34. De-Bellis, Jack, **Oedipal Angstrom**, *Wascana Review of Contemporary Poetry and Short Fiction*, 24:1, Spring 1989, p. 45-59.

35. Tanner, Tony, **A Compromised Environment**, *City of Words: American Fiction, 1950-1970*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 273-294.

a self—winnowing chaos'. The critic asserts that the universal fact of continuous erosion is a haunting shadow in Updike's world and 'waste' is an obsession in his works and the horror of a wasting world brings him quiet close to writers like Pynchon. Tanner's most significant observation is about the conflict (which tears at many of Updike's characters) between the fear of loving their selfhood by becoming submerged in their environment and their intuition that life in that environment is the best antidote to that great cosmic dread and sense of universal waste that besets them.

Some critics have objected to the idea of interpreting Updike in allegorical terms. S.A. Zylstra's *John Updike And The Parabolic Nature Of The World*[36] is a plea against overly allegorical readings of Updike's work and in favour of a respect for the writer's opennes. Working from Auden's definition of Parables (secular stories with no overt religious overtones), Zylstra suggests that Updikes fiction is parabolic and Updike's imagination retains a character open to all readers irrespective of their belief, although Zylstra implies that Updike hopes that his

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36. Zylstra, S.A., **John Updike and the Parabolic Nature of the World**, *Soundings*, 56, 1973, pp. 323-37.

readers will respond to the spiritual implications of his parables.

Robert Regan in *Updike's Symbol Of The Center*[37] notes the numerous circle images in Updike's work, and asserts that they are related to the writers interest in the Jungian 'mandala'—the symbol of psychic integration - and Updike's Christian belief that mandala figures are gifts from God. Focussing primarily on *Midpoint*, *First Person Singular* in *Assorted Prose*, and *Pigeon Feathers*, Regan observes how the centers in Updike's work faithfully exemplify mysterious centres of life. Updike agrees with Karl Barth that there is no way for the individuals to reach God, but there is a way from God to us. His chosen form of communication is through mandala imagery. Updike's purpose as a writer is to make his readers see, if not necessarily understand, the principle of unity that exists in the universe. David Kern in *Pigeon Feathers* is transported into mystery through circles. According to Regan, the hypothesis of Updike's art is that rapture of the first creator should be emulated by all creators thus he wrote circular stories.

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37. Regan, Robert, **Updike's Symbol of the Center**, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 20, 1974, pp. 77-96.

Mary Allen and some other critics have discussed the feminist as well as the gender studies of Updike's work. Allen in *John Updike's Love of Dull Bovine Beauty*.[38] discusses Updike's dependence in his fiction on the idea of the 'undeniably stupid women'. Referring to *Rabbit Redux*, she coments that Updike allows his bias for the stupid-sexual woman to intrude to the point of forcing a violent death upon an intelligent girl like Jill whom he dislikes and cannot deal with. She further states that Updike's horror of the powerful manipulative mother turns him, with an extra fondness, to the docile woman who can be dominated. The Oedipal problem for Updike seems to open the field to all others, a wide and delicious playground for his men. Hardly a woman here is without sexual appeal. and everything can be forgiven except frigidity.

Josephine Hendin[39] observes that, Updike's male chauvinists look at women as the solitary source of meaning in life. Hendin focusses on one force-the

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38. Allen, Mary, **John Updike's Love of Dull Bovine Beauty**, *The Necessary Blankness: Women in Major American Fiction of the 1960s*. Urbana; University of Illionis Press, 1976.

39. Hendin, Josephine, **The Victim is a Hero**; *Vulnerable People : A View of American Fiction Since 1945*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Oedipal conflict using her analysis of it as the impetus for her comments: 'Joey's (*Of The Farm*) self hatred turns to hatred for his wife who is the living sign of his bad taste'. Hendin believes that Updike has in his novels explored male freedom as a myth, men are Adams who are beckoned by Eves to fall from the grace of maleness into a life of labour. God reveals destiny to man through marriage. Updike in fact, links the decline of society with the decline of masculinity. George Bodmer[40] sees Updike's males as confronting a bewildering change in the social order. Their wives and female counterparts demand an equality of experience which they are unable to understand. They retreat into an attitude of nostalgia for simpler times. For such heroes women are inspiration or even a romantic landscape on which their lives are played out. Although inspired by women, they are paralyzed by their commitent to traditions which tie them down to rigid and inoperable roles.

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40. Bodmer, George R., **Sounding the Fourth Alarm: Identity and the Masculine Tradition in the Fiction of Cheever and Updike**, *Gender Studies: New Directions in Feminist Criticism*, Ed. Judith Spender. Bowling Green, Popular, 1986, pp. 148-161.

Donald Greiner in his book *Adultery in the American Novels*[41] says that Updike has avoided the topics of apocalypse in his novels and concentrates on the mundane ordinariness of the daily routine. His domestic novels project adultery as the threat to the cohesiveness of family. Greiner links Updike to a tradition of adultery in the American novel, discussing Hawthorne, Henry James and Updike, Greiner discusses how these writers handle similar interests in realistic depiction of domestic detail, portrayal of character, and the role of adultery in the daily affairs that comprise the social contract. He thinks that these novelists, writing in different times and renowned in their eras for dissection of adultery, treat basically the same material. James responds to adultery from a social perspective, while Updike insists on an individual reaction that is denied the traditional sureties of social pressure and moral precept The mundane particulars for Updike are an indication of spiritual belief, while James has no sense of religious belief. In this matter Greiner links Updike with Hawthorne, adultery for whom was closely linked with moral and spiritual

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41. Greiner, Donald, *Adultery in the American Novel: Updike, James and Hawthorne,* Columbia, The University of South Carolina Press, 1985.

concerns. Greiner argues in his essay *Body And Soul: John Updike And The Scarlet Letter*[42] that the primary area in which Updike and Hawthorne meet is the unity of religion, sexual transgression, and guilt. Erotic desire and religious sensibility shape the centers of their fiction. Hawthorne's novel is characterized by a war between flesh and spirit, his characters have an overwhelming sense of guilt without any conviction of sin, whereas Updike characters slough off the guilt and emerge triumphantly confident.

The erotic behaviour of Updike's male protagonists is also analyzed by Elizabeth Tallent in her book on Updike's erotic heroes.[43] She argues that the desire for retreat,and the equal and opposite yearning for erotic risk,provide the primary tensions for much of Updike's fiction. Updikes heroes are conceited lovers,they turn their mistresses into wives and even displace the men to whom their mistresses are married. The single great domestic truth accessible to nearly all of Updike's characters

42. Greiner, Donald, **Body and Soul: John Updike and *The Scarlet Letter***, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 15, 1989, 475-495.

43. Tallent, Elizabeth, *Married Men and Magic Tricks: John Updike's Erotic Heroes*, Berkeley: Creative Arts, 1982.

is marriage, the single great uncertainty is posed by the possibility of adultery. The tension between the two polarities works to assure married men that they are alive. They are acquainted with the possibility of extinction and hence adultery becomes more than a way of proving they are alive, it becomes a way of proving they will never die.

A few sociological studies of Updike's works are worth mentioning. Donald Greiner in *John Updike's Novels*[44] states that he has no definite thesis for Updike's novels and wants to discuss them at the thematic level. In his book he takes into account three novels of the Rabbit quartet and some other novels. With a close analysis of the text, in terms of the development of the character, his position in society, the changing trends of American politics, culture and society and their direct impact on an individual's repsonses, Greiner concludes that Updike is too prolific and unpredictable, and his work cannot be confined to a single thesis. Greiner gives brief overviews of the critical reception of the novels and sometimes points at the literary influences like Hawthorne and Karl Barth on Updike.

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44. Greiner, Donald, *John Updike's Novels*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1984.

Matthew Wilson in his article *The Rabbit Tetralolgy: From Solitude To Society To Solitude Again*[45] makes a significant study of the Rabbit Quartet. H holds that Harry's desperate search for a valid identity in the chaotic society is also due to his sense of alienation as he is not able to merge with it. This theme of quest for identity is traced throughout the Quartet.

Many critics have drawn similarities between Updike's fiction and the writings of his contemporaries. George Searles in *The Ficiton of Philip Roth and John Updike*[46] attempts to consider Roth and Updike together. Searles believes that since both Roth and Updike are contemporaries and write about the same locale, their fiction hints at interesting parallels. They address the same large social issues—ethnic identity, famity relationships, individual moral responsibility and guilt, sexuality and romantic love, materialism and social mores in general.

Dilvo Ristoff is of the opinion that the fiction of John Updike has in it much of contemporary

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45. Wilson, Matthew, **The Rabbit Tetralogy: From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again**, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 37:1, Spring, 1991.

46. Searles, George J. *The Fiction of Philip Roth and John Updike*, Carbondale, Southern Illionis University Press, 1984.

history. In his book *The Presence Of Contemporary America In The Rabbit Trilogy*[47], he observes that Updike's fiction, the Rabbit Trilogy in particular, unfolds the rich details of the various political, economic events as well as the movements of the decade in each novel. He shows how Updike's characters are an unconscious product of their times, how they are influenced by these social changes and how they react to them.

Thus, we can see that there has always been a great divergence of views about Updike's works. Some of the critical work are just a repetition of the previous works.

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47. Ristoff, D., *Updike's America: The Presence of contemporary American History in John Updike's Rabbit Trilogy,* New York, Lang, 1988.

Chapter-2

RABBIT, RUN

Rabbit Angstrom is Updike's most famous character and *Rabbit, Run* his most recognized title. Divorced from all conventional standards of morality and heroism, the protagonist came as a shock to many critics and readers and hence the novel elicited a wide spectrum of responses of the most diverse nature. It was hailed as a masterpiece by some reviewers, while others almost shunned it, dubbing the subject as 'the stuff of shabby domestic tragedy and its milieu one of spiritual poverty in which 'the old people are listless and defeated, the young mostly empty'[1]. Another reviewer, Milton Rugoff was far more critical. He saw in Rabbit a complex of vague ideals and uncontrolled desires and regarded Rabbit's rebellion as perverse, limited to a nostalgic longing for former athletic triumphs.[2] Reviewers were more offended by the portrayal of the central character than by the explict sexuality and by Updike's neutral attitude towards the character and the ambivalent ending of the novel. *Time*

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1. Boroff David **You Cannot Really Flee** *New York Times Book Review*, Nov. 6, 1960., p. 4, 43.

2. Rugoff Milton **Ameican Tragedy: 1960**, New York *Herald Tribune Book Review*, (Nov. 6, 1960), p. 7.

magazine saw Rabbit as a 'weak, sensual, selfish and confused moral bankrupt'[3] devoid of inner resources.

But other favourable reviews defended the novel. Richard Gilman placed the novel in the tradition of French 'anti literature' associated with Nathalie Sarraute and described *Rabbit, Run* as a a'grotesque allegory of American life with its myth of happiness and success'. He regarded the book as a 'minor epic of the spirit thirsting for room to discover and be itself, ducking, dodging, staying out of reach of everything that will pin it down and impale it on fixed, immutable laws that are not of its own making and do not consider its integrity'[4]. There were others who viewed the absurd, frantic fleeing of Rabbit as a desperate religious quest in a world where traditional christian faith has suffered deep erosion. Richard Locke said: 'the essential theme of *Rabbit, Run* is civilization and its discontents: the opposing claims of self and society, the sacrifices of energy and individuality that civilization demands.'[5].

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3. **Desperate Weakling** *Time* 7 (Nov. 1960), 108.

4. Gilman Richard **A Distinguished Image of Precarious Life** *Commonweal* 73 (OCt. 28, 1960) p. 128-9.

5. Locke Richard **John Updike** *Span* (Feb, 1973), pp. 35-38.

Rabbit, Run, first published in 1960, was revised four years later for Penguin edition basically to restore some of the more explicit sexual passages that knopf's legal department had asked the author to delete. Thus the Penguin edition is closer in one important sense to Updike's original intention than the first edition. 'The main stimulant' behind the changes, says Updike, 'was to restore the censored bits. The other changes are small improvised changes with no overall intention in mind beyond simple aesthetic improvement'[6] In fact, the changes served various functions as clarification of diction, enrichment of texture and most significantly the focusing of characterization and thematic purpose. For example, several subtle elaborations bring more clearly to light the weaknesses of the priest Eccles regarding his uncertainty of faith. His inward admission that 'he doesn't believe anything' is exposed to view in the added line 'Mrs. Springer seems to read this in his face'[7] Later he muses, not just that 'he's forgotten much theology' but that 'he's forgotten most of the theology they made him absorb.'[8] The

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6. Quoted from Waldron, Randall H., **Rabbit Reviewed**, *American Literature* vol. 56,, No. 1, (March 84) p. 53.

7. *Rabbit Run*, Penguin, 1969, p. 125.

8. *Rabbit, Run*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1970, p. 130.

change not only indicates a greater measure of the forgotten theology but a fundamental resistance to it in the first place. Again in the 1970 knopf edition, Updike partially restored a few first edition readings which had been changed in the Penguin edition. These changes testify to the degree of his concern for the craft of his fiction. Moreover, these changes also have pertinence to the central thematic concerns. Above all, perhaps, they emphasize the graphic quality of his prose, a quality suggested by the subtitle 'A motion picture' which was later deleted from the manuscript.

Updike's initial treatment of the theme of *Rabbit, Run* first appeared in the story, *'Ace in the Hole'*[9] and in the poem *'Ex Basketball Player'*[10] Fred 'Ace' Anderson, a former high school basketball star anticipates the character of Rabbit. Everything for him since his senior year at school has been anti climactic. He too is trapped in the vortex of social responsibilities and a demeaning job. And he strives to shut out the unpleasantness of the present by recreating the achievements of

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9. Updike John , *The Same Door: Short Stories*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1962.

10. Updike, John *The Carpentered Hen and Other Tame Creatures*, New York, Harper & Row, 1958.

his past. Another of Updike's former basketball stars, Fleck finds nothing worthwhile on which he can lay his 'fine and nervous'[11] fingers once he has retired from the basketball courts.

Before the novel was published, Updike's original concept had been to write two novellas, to be bound into one volume, which would contrast two approaches to the game of life 'one would be the rabbit approach—spontaneous, unreflective, frightened, hence my character's name Angstrom, and second was the horse method of coping with life, to get into harness and pull your load until you drop. And this was eventually *The Centaur*. But I began the Rabbit book first.'[12] *The Centaur* illustrated a more responsible pattern of behaviour while *Rabit, Run* that of instinctual gratification. The Rabbit book proved too large to include the other. If *The Centaur* is heroic in theme and morally edifying in tenor, *Rabbit, Run* represents the perfect disaster in terms of conventional heroism and morality.

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11. Updike, John **Ex-basketbal Player** *The New York Book of Poems*, New York: The Viking Press, 1969, p. 208.

12. Updike, John **Why Rabbit Had To Go** *The New York Times Book Review*, Aug. 5, 1990, p. 1, 24.

How an individual can rebel against the compromised environment of an organized society is the suject of *Rabbit, Run*. When we first meet him, Harry Rabbit, Angstrom, as his name suggests is a harried and anxious twenty six year old yearning to be free from the binding commitments and responsibilities that life has thrust upon him too soon. The glory and excitement that his talent had earned him in school, quickly withered away amidst the dull routine of adult life. He finds his job of selling kitchen peelers specially degrading, based as it is on the proposition, 'fraud makes the world go round.'[13] When he reaches home, he finds wife Janice, pregnant with their second child, mindlessly watching television and drinking in their squalid cramped apartment. His real problems are how to sell the junk he doesnot believe in, returning home to a marriage that drains his spirit, that insists on finality instead of fluidity. He finds himself incapable of meeting these demands.

The opening scene is the whole novel in miniature and sets the tone for the novel where Rabbit is seen shirking his responsibilities time and

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13. Updike. John *A Rabbit Omnibus, Rabbit, Run*, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 7.

again and behaving in an immature manner. In the first scene we find Rabbit playing alley-basketball with twelve year olds at a time when he should be rushing back to his home and wife after work. Immediately, one of the basic themes is enforced when Rabbit muses, '..the kids keep coming, they keep crowding you up.'[14] 'Crowded' is, in fact, one of the most recurrent feelings that grips Harry. He makes an interesting discovery in the novel'Funny, how what makes you move is so simple and the field you must move in is so crowded.'[15] How crowded this particular field is, and how Harry attempts to find some personally satisfying mode of motion within it or out of it, is the subject of the novel.

On reaching home, a precarious feeling grips Rabbit, and his 'throat feels narrow.'[16] He feels stifled in his own house Updike's description of clutter and confusion in the Angstrom household serves as an objective correlative for his protagonist's inner restlessness. Harry finds himself in a trap and 'feels sickened by its intricacy'.[17] He feels that he

14. Ibid., p. 3.

15. Ibid., p. 177.

16. Ibid., p. 9.

17. Ibid., p. 7.

is not quite himself, a free individual with a distinct identity. He imagines himself 'on a cliff, there is an abyss he will fall into..'[18] Harry sees a big question mark before him: why am I me? The mouseketeer show on television provides him with an answer 'know thyself...It means, be what you are...be yourself. God doesn't want a tree to be a waterfall, or a flower to be a stone. God gives to each one of us a special talent... That's the way to be happy'[19] The message pierces through Harry's psyche prompting him to rebel against his situation. The key to mouseketeer's advice is that he mentions God. The only believer in God's grace, Rabbit now knows that if God does not want a waterfall to be a tree, he also does not want Rabbit to give up his individuality to a socially defined role. Rabbit had two options before him—either to commit himself to his family and suffer the pain of his existence with patience, or to tear himself away from his domestic life and carry on his rebellion passionately. Rabbit chooses the later course for himself and runs away from his wife and home.

Once on flight, he realizes quite early that the snare of society that he was trying to flee is not

18. Ibid, p. 15.

19. Ibid, p. 6.

easy to escape. The roads that were drawing him away, hinting at escape to a sunny mythical south, seem to be part of the same trap. Just as the clutter of the house he has left 'clings to his back like a tightening net'[20] so the roads promising release become a trap since he does not know where he is heading, he does not know how to get there. He starts feeling that no matter how he moves, he cannot get rid of some kind of system. Harry feels the net thickening and is finally brought to a halt, tangled up in a mess of unknown roads. When he tries to find himself on a map, 'The names melt away and he sees the map whole, a net, all those red lines and blue lines and stars, a net somewhere he is caught in'[21]. Dean Doner sums up Harry's predicament as that of a person who is 'fleeing from a great number of things, many of them the usual pressures, the usual traps, of contemporary life....the novel delineates...the claustrophobic nature of our institutions: an economy which traps a man into mean, petty, lying hucksterism; tenement apartment housing which traps a man and his family into close, airless, nerve shattering 'togetherness'; unimaginative dirty cities which offer

20. Ibid., p. 9.

21. Ibid, p. 21.

no release for the spirit; the ugly voices of advertising and television, the middle class morality which wars with man's nature'[22]

While on his way, he is asked by the man at the petrol pump as to where he wants to go. Harry's reply 'I don't know exactly' in fact sums up his response to many questions in life. The man advises him, 'The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there'[23] But Harry's life as introduced at the outset of the novel, is based on his instincts on which he relies more than anything else throughout the novel. The abortive nature of his flight is established when Harry has to return back to Brewer the same night. He returns, however, not to his deserted wife, but to his basketball coach Tothero, who initiates him into his extramarital relationship with Ruth. It is significant to note how the relationship between basketball and adultery is established. Tothero's guidance initates Rabbit into both.

Ruth's role in Rabbit's life is much more than a prostitute's. He is irresistibly drawn to her. Both

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22. Doner, Dean **Rabbit Angstrom's Unseen World**, *John Updike*, ed. D. Thorburn, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice, 1979.

23. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 28.

seem to have an ideal relationship as Ruth stands for everything that Janice lacks. She is a good cook and has a flair for housekeeping. Harry's incompatible marriage with Janice was further worsened by the dead sexual life they led. But sex with Ruth becomes an almost spirtual experience. Rabbit finds this new life full of promise inspite of the illicit nature of the relationship. But the pseudomarital bliss they experience is transient, as Rabbit rushes back to his wife when their daughter is born. The rest of the novel is an account of Rabbit's oscillation between his wife and mistress, a pattern of attempted disentanglement and attempted reintegration into society.

The reasons for Harry's unadjustment with society and his consequent rebellion can be traced to his adolescence. He strives for the same perfection and skill in life that he had known on the basketball court. For years, the motion of his life has been upward, as if aspirations were a natural continuum, a never ending urging toward accomplishment. The sense of elation that he experienced in school has been missing since. The feeling of elation while playing basketaball when 'everybody cheers; with the sweat in your eyebrows you can't see very well and the noise swirls around

you and lifts you up'[24], is what he aspires for. But Harry is slow to realize that nobody keeps going up forever, society demands that he settle down. Resisting this downward motion more by intuition than analysis, Harry is the only character trying to ascend. He aspires while others accept '...the true space in which we live is upward space'[25] No wonder he dreads the downward slide, the abyss which his relationship with Janice has become. While with Ruth he feels a kind of ecstasy, a feeling of extraordinary achievement.

According to Donald Greiner, 'In *Rabbit, Run* Updike poses a dilemma that results in the ambiguity he aspires to: should Rabbit define himself by social convention, or should he indulge his yearning toward individual belief? Harry sees the conflict as either a nine to five job and dinner in the kitchen or the freedom to run but with no place to go'[26] This conflict is called by Updike as the yes-but quality of his fiction, 'Yes, in *Rabbit,Run*, to our inner urgent whispers, but the social fabric

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24. Ibid, p. 4.

25. Ibid, p. 66.

26. Greiner, Donald, '*John Updike's Novels*, Athens, Ohio University Press, p.50.

collapses murderously'[27] Updike further explains 'There is no reconciliation between the inner, intimate appetites and the external consolations of life ...there is no way to reconcile these individual wants to the very real need of any society to set strict limits and to confine its members'.[28]

Unable to return to the network of his life with his wife, he moves in with Ruth, life with Ruth seems to him a way to remain in the calm and uninvolved center of the net. According to Gerry Brenner 'Part of Ruth's appeal to Rabbit is that her occupation consists of 'doing nothing' she does what comes easiest to her, making her living by her natural endowments, her body. She, like Rabbit, is a natural.'[29] She is still capable of responding to natural erotic love, unlike Janice. On their first night together, Rabbit insists on acting like a husband, he scrubs her face clean of make up and

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27. Samuels Charles Thomas **The Art of Action XLIII: John Updike,** *Paris Review*, 12, winter 168, p. 100.

28. Gado Frank Ed. **Interview with John Updike**, in *First Person: Conversations on Writers and Writing,* Schenectady, New York, Union college Press, 1973. p. 72.

29. Brenner Gerry, *Rabbit, Run* : **John Updike's Criticism Of The Return To Nature**, *Twentieth Century literature*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Apr 1966. p. 9.

then refuses her to use a contraceptive, and burying himself in her, finds an ecstasy that he has always associated with basketball. At this point in the novel, Ruth is a foil to Rabbit's ego, she offers no challenge to his intuitions. But Updike develops her character and gives her a point of view. She is sensitive and intelligent enough to sense that Rabbit is on a sort of quest, that his actions are not entirely immature and irresponsible. She tells him the reason she likes him is that "you haven't given up. In your stupid way you're still fighting"[30] Ruth ultimately represents one more aspect of the responsibility from which Rabbit runs.

Rabbit is not at all bothered by his sexual waywardness because his need for physical action unites sex and basketball in his mind. He expresses his feeling on the basketball court as follows:

'There was you and sometimes the ball and then the hole, the high perfect hole with its pretty skirt of net. It was you, just you and that fringed ring, and sometimes it came down right to your lips it seemed and sometimes it stayed away, hard and remote and small,'[31] This is the reason sex becomes

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30. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 54.

31. Ibid, p. 17.

sole expression of the ecstatic in life. Sex with Ruth returns him to a kind of physical freedom, makes him feel a winner again, free of all traps, momentarily 'out of dimension'. But in the end we find Rabbit cannot escape the biological trap when Ruth gets pregnant. When she demands that he turn the ecstatic into domestic, Rabbit runs again. In this novel, therefore, sex is the promise of escape, but it is also always the enactment of the impossibility of escape.

When Rabbit decides to move in with Ruth he gets back to his apartment, to get his clothes. There he meets Reverend Jack Eccles, the humanistic episcopalian minister, who tries throughout the novel to get Rabbit to return to his fanrily. Updike since his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* delineates the conflict between faith and humanism. Eccles, like Conner in the earlier novel, serves the role of the antagonist. Dean Doner says that "the minister controls people by throwing the net of shared guilt about them, by showing them the uttermost consequences of their every act—consequences not to their souls, but to the earthly happiness of others."[32] Eccles says 'With my church, I believe

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32. Doner Dean, p. 27.

that we are responsible beings, responsible for ourselves and for each other'[33]. His sole motive in the novel is to reunite Harry back into the social net.

Rabbit in the novel, has undefined and intuitive religious feelings which lead him to announce vaguely that behind all the visible scenery 'there's something that wants me to find it'[34] This statement, invests Rabbit's search with a new religious context. Again, his inner quest for something is contrasted with 'nothing' that life in society and its conventional behaviour without faith present to him. Society without faith is here embodied in the figure of Jack Eccles who makes fun of Rabbit's intuitive feelings. ''What is it? what is it? Is it hard or soft?

Harry Is it blue? Is it red? Does it have polka dots?" Again he accuses Rabbit, "The truth is you're monstrously selfish. You're a coward. You don't care about right or wrong; you worship nothing except your own worst instincts."[35] Rabbit is, however, unable to express his religious feeling, his faith in transcendental order except for manifesting it

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33. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 88.

34. Ibid, p. 74.

35. Ibid, p. 77.

in a perfectly hit golf shot. Therefore, his faith invites suspicion of other characters. Rabbit, in the novel, professes an individual kind of faith, which is ultimate in itself and totally estranged from conventional goodness or morality. In other words, his faith too is a rebellion against conventional christianity, 'He has no taste for the going through quality of christianity'. [36] Moreover, the church offers no help to Rabbit in his moment of crisis. 'Afraid, really afraid he remembers what once consoled him by seeming to make a hole where he looked through into underlying brightness, and lifts his eyes to the church window. It is, because of church poverty, or the late summer nights or just carelessness, unlit, a dark circle in a stone facade'.[37] Nevertheless,he keeps clinging to his faith, because he feels without the transcendental, the world is a pit of horror, a blank space. Therefore, what he seeks is not the consoling reinforcement of dogma or ritual but some transcendent inner version of truth that will make life more meaningful.

Except for Reverend Kruppenbach and Rabbit, no other character has faith. Eccles's conception of

36. Ibid, p.88

37. Ibid, p. 177.

ministry is sociological or psychological, he plays golf with people so that he can know their troubles, he spends a good deal of his time drinking coke at the drugstore so that he can know the teenagers and thus reach them. Eccles plays golf with Rabbit and uses the game to question him. He tries to make Rabbit realize that his behaviour is immature and to make him feel guilty about it. But Rabbit has an unusual perception of reality. "If you're telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out it is the same thing as being dead".[38] For Rabbit, maturity means accepting responsibility for one's actions even when they bring consequences different from those originally intended.

Rabbit seeks for perfection and finds his marriage ordinary "I once did something right. I played first rate basketball. I really did and after you're first rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second rate. And that little thing Janice and I did had going, boy, it was really second rate."[39] Nevertheless, he returns to Janice and his home when he has a baby. They take

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38. Ibid, p. 62.

39. Ibid, p. 24.

up their life again, Rabbit having meekly swallowed as best as he can the vast spread guilt which he had spilt. But he leaves Janice again, when she rejects his sexual advances. Janice when deserted gets herself drunk and accidently drowns the baby Rebecca. Rabbit has to return for the funeral and at the funeral he senses that the mourners are trying to spread the net .of shared guilt on him.Instinctively, he cries out "Don't look at me ...I didn't kill her"[40] Brutal as his remarks are, the real significance of the scene comes when we realize that, of all those gathered there, only Rabbit believes in God, in life after death. For Rabbit the words 'I am the resurrection and the life' have meaning. One who believes in God, he may assign guilt, for there is help 'casting every care on Thee'. For others, there is no help beyond themselves.

Rabbit once again comes back to Ruth, but here too he finds himself in a trap, Ruth is pregnant. Again he finds himself confronted with guilt and responsibility. But his own reflections in the end about his plight are significant. 'Goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside, those things he was trying to balance have no weight. He feels his

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40. Ibid, p. 170.

inside as very real suddenly, a pure open space in the middle of a dense net. I don't know, he kept telling Ruth, he dosen't know, what to do, where to go, what will happen, the thought that he dosen't know serves to make him infinitely small and impossible to capture. His smallness fills him like a vastness'.[41]

Rabbit like Updike distinguishes between the good way and the right way. The path which the society calls right might be crushing for an individual, his internal goodness as divorced with any outward morality is what is right and significant for him. In *Self Consciousness*, Updike writes of 'something intrinsically and individually vital (in each of us) which must be defended against the claims even of virtue'.[42] This is what Rabbit follows. He feels that there is something precious and unnameable, which is the very essence of self, that has to be guarded against external hostilities. J.A. Ward rightly says that in *Rabbit, Run* 'the socially responsible are less alive than Rabbit. They are seen as denying their inner reality for the sake of mass delusion.'[43]

41. Ibid, p. 177.

42. Updike John **Why Rabbit Had To Go**, *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 Aug 90, p. 24.

43. Ward, J.A. **John Updike's Fiction** *Critique*, 5, 1962, p. 34.

Rabbit's rebellion is also indicative of the failure of community and institution at large. Neither marriage, parenthood, vocation, school, nor church can provide him with a reason for taking up the responsibilities that each one of them offers. Rabbit's refusal to allow society to absorb the self may be rooted in the courage not to give in, an intuitive realization that what is right socially is wrong personally, or it may be individualism bordering on selfishness. But the rightness or wrongness of his running is not the issue, rather, the novel urges acknowledging the complexity of his dilemma.

Rabbit Run does not offer answers, but it does pose problems, and one problem, as illustrated by the epigraph is: how does a man find grace when the little demands of living crowd out his life? The epigraph, 'The motions of Grace, the hardness of the heart., external circumstance' by Pascal serves as a summary of the novel in which Rabbit's motions of grace are balanced against the hardness of his heart and the external circumstances that victimize him.

The epigraph suggests that the relation between action and internal needs is determined by the external circumstances of one's life. Culture shapes peronality. Social forces clash with Rabbit's sense

of possibilities. The demands of family deny the motions of grace. It is not that society is malignant or that Harry is a saint but neither can prevent the slow disintegration of each other. Updike's disapproving critics want him to take a stand, to balance either social pressures or individual whim, but to do so is to ignore the ambiguity that colours these lives. If Rabbit could understand the harmony of Pascal's thought, he would be paralyzed. Rather than wait for a rational explanation of the balance between external circumstances and internal needs, he runs. Yet even though he runs he is the only one in the novel to sense the motions of grace. He cannot translate his intuition in words, but his yearning is more valuable than Eccles' need to demythologize belief to the level of humanism. Regaining grace, in all its manifestations is vital to Rabbit, but he does not know how to go about it.

American novels depicting the conflict between self and society are as old as *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*. Harry's running has, in fact, often been compared to Huck Finn's wanting to quit society and avoid growing up. Huck Finn discovers that the consciousness he values most cannot expand within the confines of society. The self cannot come to fuller life through social drama, all

it can do is escape. Rabbit also discovers that escape from the pretensions and inconsistences of the world is the only course by which he can maintain his integrity. Like Huck Finn, he too lights out for the wilderness; escape becomes fulfillment and irresponsibility becomes responsibility.

Edward P. Vargo places Harry along with some of the best known American characters: As a running quester, Harry Angstrom fits into a long American tradition. The escape from culture itself is apparent in the figure of Cowper's Natty Bumppo, Melville's Ishmael, Twain's Huckleberry Finn, and Thoreau himself in Walden.[44]

Rabbit's predicament and his unusual response towards it is also suggestive of the age he belonged to. The decade of tranquilized fifties' in Robert Lowell's phrase was remarkable for its anxiousness and the general rebelliousness that it generated. There was a dark underside to the decade's prim and proper public face. There were ticks of regret, signs of incipient rebellion just beneath the quiet surface. It was an age of conformity but also saw

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44. Vargo, Edward P., *Rainstorms and Fire: Ritual in the Novels of John Updike*, Port Washington, New York, Kennikat Press, 1973, p.56.

the beginning of revolt against conformity as seen in the Beat Movement.

American writers that emerged during the fifties: Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Truman Capote, Ralph Ellison, William Styron, John Cheever, J.D. Salinger, Philip Roth have striking similarities with Updike in this respect. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, for example, captured not only the perennial confusion of adolescence, but also the moral discomforts of the entire age. *Rabbit, Run* overlaps with Malamud's *A New life*, Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* and Salinger's stories, all of which have in common a character who has refused his role or who is attempting to rediscover himself by running. Each novel is placed on the feeling that to escape is to live, or try to live whereas to remain placid is to accept death. Rabbit's runing like Augie March's is the result of a conscious refusal to lead a disappointed life.

During the fifties a revival of victorian respectability made domesticity seem not ony attractive but also very desirable. It was a decade in which young men equated marriage with respectability and manhood they so desperately sought, and imagined pregnancy was the dream only to discover that children were the nightmare. Updike says, '*Rabbit*

Run was a product of fifties and not really in a conscious way about the fifties.'[45]

When the novel was published in 1960, what impressed readers most was the fact that Rabbit was not a rebel of heroic stature but a little man refusing to be trapped by life's petty demands who believes that he will be trapped if he accepts society's roles of domesticity and statis. The character of Rabbit is not designed to be admirable but Updike expects the readers to understand this flawed and baffled man who inadvertently hurts others while he fights to break free of the social net. Updike says, 'Unfallen Adam is an ape' which means that mere contentment and satisfaction are a denial of our humanity, 'To be a person' Updike insists 'is to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all just an animal with clothes or a statistic.'[46] Discontentment for him is the quintessence of spiritual vitality.

Regarding the goodness of Rabbit, Updike writes in the Preface to the 1977 Franklin library edition, 'Rabbit is the hero of this novel, but is he a

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45. Updike John, **Why Rabbit Had To Go**, *The New York Times Book Review*, 5 Aug. 1990, p. 24.

46. Samuels, C.T. p. 101.

goodman. the question is meant to lead to another—what is goodness?... In the end, the act of running, of gathering a black momentum 'out of a kind of sweet panic' offers itself as containing a kernel of goodness; but perhaps a stone or a flower at rest holds the same kernel'.[47] Updike refuses to answer his question directly, but he implies that goodness is a large part of Rabbit's make up when he calls him 'fertile and fearful and not easy to catch ... wild and timid, harmful and loving, hardhearted and open to the motions of grace.'[48] Through Rabbit's character Updike wants to show that goodness is not necessarily tied to conventional morality and that sin and grace are bound ambiguously together. Having discerned a spiritual vaccum at the heart of a merely moral life, he declines to live it. He will not collapse the distinction between what he calls 'the right way and the good way,' the path of self denying responsibility and the path of self indulgent adventure. Rabbit chases down the latter trail because it seems to be the only road toward real life. He will not accept the death of the self which moral conformity entails. Rabbit's actions

47. Updike, John **On One's Own Oeuvre**, *Hugging The Shore: Essays and Criticism* New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1983, p. 850.

48. Ibid p. 851.

echo Updike's belief that the heart cannot be kept alive except in revolt against the world's deadening conformity. 'The heart prefers to move against the grain of circumstance, perversity is the soul's very life.'[49]

Rabbit runs but he remains baffled, unable to say clearly what he runs from or runs toward. Although Rabbit is not intelligent enough to realise it, his problem is unsolvable. Updike explains, 'There is no reconciliation between the inner, intimate appetites and the external consolations of life... there is no way to reconcile these individual wants to the very real need of any society to set strict limits and to confine its members.'[50]

In walking out on his chaotic family life Rabbit thinks he has found a 'freedom into which the clutter of the world has been vaporized by the simple trigger of his decision'.[51] But while leaving seems easy, to discover destination is difficult. His moments of confindence 'Funny the world cannot

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49. Quoted in Ralph Wood, *TheComedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists,* Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, p. 208.

50. Gado, Frank, p. 92.

51. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 29.

touch your'[52] and 'he feels freedom like oxygen everywhere around them'[53] are short lived; and his often repeated action of suddenly running is suggestive of his growing panic that all fields are crowded fields. What keeps him away from home is the idea that somwhere 'he'd find an opening'. but there are no openings in the world that will afford the individual sudden release into pure uncluttered freedom. All of Rabbit's improvised escapes, all of his bouncing back and forth demonstrate the impossibility of any flight. In *Rabbit, Run*, the only escape, the only liberation is provisional - in sex or in the first moments of running.

Although the final sentences of the novel seem to promise escape, the structure of the novel leaves no doubt that the effort to 'find an opening' is futile one. In Updike's world, there are either no openings, or any seeming opening inevitably closes into a trap. Rabbit runs in circles. Updike stresses Rabbit's panic at the end, his genuine fear. For seeking consolation, he looks toward the windows of a church, but they are dark. The metaphor of net comes again to his mind as he tries to avoid

52. Ibid, p. 15.

53. Ibid, p. 16.

he tries to avoid capture by the external circumstances 'Goodness lies inside, there's nothing outside, those things he was trying to balance have no weight. He feels his inside as very real suddenly, a pure blank space in the middle of a dense net.'[54]

The final lines suggests the open endedness of his search. He tries to balance the right way and the good way and succumbs once again to what his instinct tells him to do, he runs.

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54. Ibid, p. 177.

Chapter-3

RABBIT REDUX

Rabbit, Run is an enactment of the bafflement that results from 'Harry's search for infinite freedom'[1] Its sequel *Rabbit Redux* suggests that Rabbit has been 'led back, restored to responsibility and health after suffering the malaise of uninhibited youthful desire. Rabbit in this novel has greatly changed, it's been ten years since he last ran away. In *Rabbit, Run*, one of the reasons for Harry's running away was that he feared to grow up like his father, passive and working as a linotypist to fend for his family. In *Redux* we find him reconciled to his fate. He sticks to his responsibilities and lives by the society's rules which it cost him so much to learn.

The fate of the younger Rabbit seems more poignant when we meet him in *Rabbit Redux* and discover what the intervening years have done to him. The young Rabbit had been able to say, 'If you have the guts to be yourself, other people will pay your price.'[2] Now he realizes he had been wrong in boasting that, but his knowledge only brings him

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1 Updike John, *Picked-up-Pieces*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975. p. 508

2 Updike, John, *Rabbit, Run, A Rabbit Omnibus*, Penguin, 1991, p. 59.

despair. One hardly calls him Rabbit, suggesting a distancing from his basketball days. Now he is simply Harry Angstrom, a dull trudging son, husband and father.

The action of the novel takes place between July and October 69. Harry is now 36, politically conservative and clearly domesticated. The sequel is also stuffed with the socio-political movements of the 60's — the black liberation movement, Vietnam war, women's liberation, hippies etc. During these ten years, Brewer has become a microcosm of American society where the material circumstances of the 50s, which still offered some breathing space to man have given to unexplainable, chaotic circumstances of the 1960s. The invasion of black movement leaves everyone insecure, women's liberation movement brings disaster to family values, protests against Vietnam war divide the whole nation into two factions. In fact, the turbulent decade had elicited similar responses from other novelists. *Armies of the Night* by Norman Mailer, *Mr. Sammler's Planet* by Saul Bellow and William Styron's *The confessions of Nat Turner*. But *Rabbbit Redux* has been much criticized for its emphasis on the historical backdrop of the sixties. Updike is said to have sacrificed the individuality and credibility of his

characters for the sake of making them a mouthpiece for the various socio-political movements of the decade. Eugene Lyons in his debunking article criticizes the novel for its 'breathtaking ineptitude'[3] and dismisses it because in this novel Updike has tried too hard to deliver a message about the United States in the 1960s and as a result lost the objectivity of *Rabbit, Run*: 'Updike's social perceptions, hardly in evidence until this novel., have already stiffened into attitudes, para political positions which so limit and define his imaginative response to his subject that to read this novel is to be taken on a guided tour of virtually every negatives cliche that can be applied to America today.'[4] Thomas R. Edwards labels *Rabbit Redux* as one of Updike's weaker novels because 'in it, the pressures of history...threaten to overpower the individuality of his characters, who tend to become representative figures, spokesmen, rather than free dramatic agents.'[5] Contrasting *Rabbit Redux* with Bellow's *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, C.T. sammels says that Bellow is strong 'in fathoming causes and

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3. Lyons. Eugene '**John Updike: The Beginning and the End**, *Critique* vol.14. spr 72. P-44.

4 Ibid p. 49.

5 Edwards Thomas **Updike's Rabbit Trilogy,** *Atlantic* Vol. 248, Oct 1981. P. 96.

asserting judgements when he analyzes the chaos of the present, but Updike 'remains too mute about questions of motivation to keep *Rabbit Redux* from the dispiriting effects of a sordid story told to no clear purpose'.[6] On the other hand, the novel was favourably received by some critics who pronounced it to be 'a great achievement, by far the most audacious and successful book Updike has written.'[7]

The novel is divided into four chapters. The first chapter is a mirror reversal of *Rabbit, Run*. The angst ridden *Rabbit of Rabbit*, Run, who searched for upward spaces and unseen worlds, slows down to an almost static life in *Rabbit Redux*. The passive and tired man is slow to realize that he is left behind not only by the world but also by his once dull and diffident Janice, who too is seeking liberation and is having an affair with her co-worker at her father's Toyota lot. When Harry's father lets in the rumours about Janice he is not only undeterred but also indifferent to the news. The determined seeker of *Rabbit, Run* has become lethargic to the point of uncaring in *Redux*. Himself passive and silent, he dislikes movement by anybody.

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6. Samuels, C.T. **Updike on the Present** *New Republic*, 20 Nov. 71, pp. 29.

7. Locke Richard, **Review of Rabbit Redux**, *New York Book Review*, 14 Nov. 71, pp. 1.11.

The changes that are happening all around him in the American society, bewilder and render him motionless. The moonshot changes his universe, the upsurging black movement changes his society and the effect of women's liberation is that his once protective and sheltered home is changed.

When Janice discloses her love affair with Charlie Stavros, Harry's reaction to the surprise of Janice is 'keep the bastard as long as I don't see him'[8] Harry's apathy eventually draws Janice out of her home. Rabbit in middle age has turned out to be an average middle class American who feels sheltered in his job, his home and his whole attitude towards life is pervaded by a sense of complacency.

This feeling is made clear by the instance when Janice is back from work and is surprised to find Harry outdoors, mowing the lawn. The apathy and passivity extends to his sexual life as well. He had assumed Janice's guilt over the drowning of their baby ten years ago. But in *Rabbit Redux* sex equals death. 'Since he refused to get her pregnant again the murder and guilt have become all his. At first he tried to explain how it was, that sex with her

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8. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 220.

had become too dark, too serious, too kindred to death, to trust anything to come out of it.'[9]

Donald Greiner thinks that although Rabbit is integrated into the society he is still in rebellion. 'Rabbit's rebellion in the first novel has the positive factor of spiritual quest...In *Redux*, his rebellion has the negative factor of stagnation; it is a kind of rebellion in reverse.'[10] Janice understands his predicament, she realises that his surge toward life which was the force behind his actions in *Rabbit, Run* is faltering. Rabbit himself understands that 'growth is betrayal... There is no arriving somewhere without leaving somewhere';[11] but he is unable to take the first step towards recovery. No one knows how to prompt him to action.

Rabbit was hardly a thinker. Instinct and intuition made for force behind all his actions in *Rabbit, Run*. In *Redux* although instinct does not have the sole domination over his actions, he cannot be called mature. He is mature only in terms of age. Sukhvir Singh says, 'Updike presents Harry in *Rabbit Redux* as a mature person having a considerable

9. Ibid., p. 200.

10. Greiner Donald, *John Updike's Novels*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1984. p.73.

11. *Rabbit Redux* p. 380.

understanding of his situation.'[12] But we witness little growth in Harry as a person and he hardly comprehends the complexity of the situation in which he finds himself. His previously held belief that he can do whatever he wants to, mellows down to a realization that 'he knows less than when he started with the difference that now he knows how little he'll always know'.[13]

Rabbit's bewilderment, one of the reasons for his inaction, is because he is caught between old restrictions and new temptations, the freedom of a permissive society. The net which he felt clinging to him in the early novel still hovers in the background According to Updike, 'There are prices paid for our straying from the social net... we're tightly enough packed that if one thing moves or falls out of place, there is a jostling felt all down the line, and someone suffers even if it's not you. You can perceive that your own wealth and happiness are in some sense carved from the hides of people who are less wealthy and happy, that your own sexual happiness is often carved from the hides of people who wind up as losers. So there's a temptation

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12. Singh, Sukhbir. *The Survivor in Contemporary American Fiction,* N. Delhi, B.R. Pub. Corp. 1991 p. 154.

13. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 191.

in front of my characters to remain absolutely quite and not be guilty of anything--shame or aggression.'[14]

Himself passive and silent, Rabbit dislikes movement by anybody. In the beginning of the novel he dislikes blacks, as he views them as a challenge to his traditional society. In *Rabbit, Run* he had tried in his own way to bring down the system and reject conventional morality. His earlier quest for spirituality and identity is subdued in older Harry who is cocooned within his self and beliefs. Quest for spirituality has been replaced by belief in the establishment. He has become a staunch conservative and the established order is more sacred than ever for him. Janice identifies him with the "silent majority", certainly unaware that Nixon took the expression from Homer, who used it to refer to the dead.'[15] In the absence of staunch religious faith nothing seems to have a lasting value for one who is challenged with a loss of the sense of spirituality and living in a society where old values are fading into the past. Hence he defends the system because he has somehow come to think of it as a corroboration

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14. Kakutane Michiko. **Turning Sex and Guilt into an American Epic**, Saturday Review oct 8, 1981, p. 15.

15. Ristoff Dilvo, *The Presence of Contemporary America in the Rabbit Trilogy*, New York, Lang, p. 77.

of his identity. He seeks his identity in the identity of the nation and puts a flag on the back window of his car. The anti establishment forces and the new movements threaten the system and hence threaten his individual identity. Thus, he has turned against revolution. He says, 'I once took that inner light trip and all I did was bruise my surroundings. Revolution, or whatever, is just a way of saying a mess is fun'[16] He defends his country's actions in Vietnam believing that America's utlimate purpose there is to 'make a happy rich country full of highways and gas stations'[17] Charlie Stavros's view that the actions of America are 'power play' are seriously criticized by Harry. He earnestly believes that 'America is beyond power, it acts as in a dream, as a face of God, wherever America is, there is freedom, and wherever America is not, madness rules with chains, darkness strangles millions. Beneath her patient bombers paradise is possible'.[18] He supports the establishment on every issue, from Indian massacres of long ago to the race riots of the 60s, and he is suspicious of hippies, demonstrators, blacks and all those who criticize his country. Dilvo

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16. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 279.

17. Ibid., p. 205.

18. Ibid., p. 206.

Ristoff believes that Harry's pro war stance has its roots in the 1950s. In *Redux*, Harry shows a sense of frustration for not having been sent to the Korean war. Therefore he says, 'his present behaviour is an ideological extension of the earlier decade rather than a rational recreation of a new personal set of logical postulates. His conclusions are established cliches whose meaning he does not fully control.'[19]

Rabbit is conservative not only in his political beliefs, but his conservatism pervades his entire being. Janice traces it to the time when he came back to her after *Rabbit, Run*, 'May be he came back to me, to Nelson and me for old fashioned reasons and wants to live an old fashioned life, but nobody does that anymore, and he feels it. He put his life in rules he feels melting away now.....he thinks he is missing something, he's always reading the paper and watching the news.'[20] Harry suffers from a sense of alienation from the rest of the society and he is bewildered at his predicament. Even his dying mother urges him to say yes to life, to formalise his break with Janice and Brewer, but he knows now that 'freedom means murder. Rebirth

19. Ristoff Dilvo. p. 77.

20. Rabbit Redux, p. 210.

means death.'[21] If he says 'yes' to the needs of the self, he must say no to the demands of the society. To do so is to cause a lot of pain.

Although the spiritual overtones in *Rabbit Redux* are not as predominant as in *Rabbit Run*, Harry still retains a little belief in spirituality and a deep embedded faith in old values. The novel is stuffed with a lot of images from modern technical life signifying the materialistic aspect of living. In fact, Rabbit's sensitivity to the natural or the spiritual in an artificial world is another factor that complicates his predicament. Rabbit reviews the artificial life that he is leading. At his linotype job he sets an article describing how in the course of bulldozing a new parking lot the workers are unearthing and demolishing old hand made artifacts. The old America of *The Poorhouse Fair* is surrendering to the artificial world of technology.

Rabbit observes that nature is what the Americans are running out of. The housing development in which Rabbit lives is plastic, sterile, baked and sad. In his house he sees a 'slippery disposable gloss. It glints back at him from the synthetic fabric of the living room sofa and a chair, the synthetic artiness of a lamp Janice bought.....the

21. Ibid p. 294.

unnatural looking natural wood of the shelves..it glints back at him from the steel sink, the kitchen linoleum with its whorls as of madness, oil in water, things don't mix...he crumples the aluminum beer can he has absent mindedly drained. Its contents feel metallic inside him: corrosive, fattening.'[22] This mechanical spirit has entered the sports as well. When he goes to watch the baseball match with Nelson and his father-in-law, he senses that something has gone wrong. Even sports have lost their earlier dignity. The crowd is loud, coarse and wild and Harry yearns to protect the game from them. But there is no game to protect anymore. Professionalism, superficial and artificial has entered the games. He is himself a craftsman like Piet Hanema in *Couples*, and is offset by slicker mechanical methods. His traditional job as a typesetter is replaced by computer typesetting. His mother's life is prolonged artificially by depending on drugs. He sees his mother's pain being eased by L-Dopa, a drug that offers no cure only relief. The moonshot is an example of American technological ascendancy. But ironically the moon is dust, lifeless and empty Reaching the moon is the supreme achievement of technology, but it is useless, except as a sign of that ascendancy.

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22. Ibid. p. 194.

The moonshot is the controlling metaphor of the novel. Harry's life is explained through moonshot, a voyage into nothingness. The lunar event serves as a backdrop against which Harry's feelings and predicament are highlighted. Harry has been shown as left behind the times and his trip in the outer world of Janice, Jill and Skeeter is similar to the trip of the astronauts to the moon. The novel is divided into four chapters and the epigraph to every part is, in fact, a quote from the recorded conversation of the astronauts. In each case the epigraph looks forward to the moon flight and backward to Harry's trap. Part of the first epigraph describes the manoevre of linking capsules in space, 'It took me quite a while to find you, but now I've got you.'[23] It also suggests Janice looking for a lover and now she has the satisfaction of finding one.

The events of the moon shot and the happenings in Harry's life are directly related. Harry learns about his wife's affair with Stavros on the same day that Apollo11 lifts off for the moon. Janice has taken her first step away from him and he thinks of his house as an empty spacecraft, 'a long emptybox in the blankness of Penn Villas, Slowly

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23. Ibid., p. 179.

spinning in the void.'[24] His sense of loss after his wife's desertion is one with the emptiness of space. According to Donald Greiner, 'Updike uses Harry's perception of his personal decline as a metaphor for the sudden changes in society and space. Rabbit sinks while the rocket soars, but both seem headed for emptiness.'[25]

Rather than seeing the moonshot as a voyage into unexplored worlds, it depresses Rabbit as a rush into nothingness. He observes that the voyage of Armstrong lacks the thrill of Columbus . 'Columbus flew blind and hit something, these guys see exactly where they're aiming and it's a big round nothing.'[26] Event which is interpreted as Greiner rightly remarks, 'what most of the world interpreted as an illustration of man's need to know becomes in *Rabbit Redux* a metaphor for aspiration that is mechanical rather than spiritual and that ends not with transcendence but with the exploration of space, emptiness, and a dead bulk which can only reflect light.'[27] This feeling of nothingness lies at the base of all activities of Harry's life. The feeling eats away at

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24. Ibid., p. 236.

25. Greiner, p. 71.

26. *Rabbit Redux,* p. 192.

27. Greiner, p. 69

his spirit to the point where he barely resembles the younger searcher in *Rabbit, Run*. Although Harry never expresses it, but he senses the absence of the imaginative, free world of *Rabbit, Run* where he could hit perfect tee shot and invest it with spiritual meaning.

The first part of the novel ends with the bungled televised monitoring of the first walk on the moon and it coincides with Harry's first night in ten years without his wife. The astronauts have left for the moon and Janice leaves for her lover.

Updike offers more of Janice's point of view in *Rabbit Redux* and the result is the increased sympathy for her predicament. Her confidence contrasts positively with Rabbit's bewilderment. In the oppressing decade of 60s, Janice has saved herself and emerges as a new woman. Now the runner in search of love and life, she shirks from Rabbit's clinging to her. Having a lover renews her and adultery has given her a new voice, a sense of self and she uses it to confront a passive Harry., `I'm trying to look honestly into myself, to see who I am and where I should be going...There's no reason for two mature people to smother each other to death simply out of inertia. I'm searching for a

valid identity and I suggest you do the same.'[28] This statement of Janice is not what we could expect from the dull wife of the 1950s. She is not a radical feminist, she wants a home and family but not at the cost of denying the self. Later on Jill endorses Janice's opinion 'she's like all you people, caught in this society, she wants to be alive while she is alive'.[29]

Part II titled 'Jill' introduces the first of the two people who radically change Harry's life. Janice moves out and Jill moves in and Harry is introduced into the new world of strange sex aş indicated by the epigraph 'It's different but it's very pretty out here.'[30] Jill belongs to the upper middle class radicals who led demonstrations against the government's actions in Vietnam and formed new drug cults, rejecting their families and materialism. Jill too had rejected the American system 'I ran away from it, I reject it.'[31] She has dismissed both the old God and angry old patriotism to which Rabbit and the society around him are dedicated and she substitutes a vague new God perceived

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28. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 239.
29. Ibid., p. 291.
30. Ibid., p. 237.
31. Ibid. 256.

under the illumination of drugs. Jill is a transcendentalist and believes in the negation of the individual ego and its selfish physical and material appetites and tries to rise above her ego. But she does not realise that the destruction of the ego and its appetites eventually implies death.

Jill, who is picked up from a black people's bar by Rabbit, gradually assumes the role of a surrogate wife to Rabbit and a sister to Nelson. Although she wants changes in society so that blacks are accepted and the war stopped she also longs for the love and security provided by the family. Both Jill and Harry are, in fact, baffled by the breakup of the family.

Jill is referred to as moonchild, a flower child and knows that Harry is earth bound. Therefore their union is not ideal and cannot last forever. Through the means of Jill, Harry has got an opportunity to look beyond his limited vision. It is difficult for his idolatry patriotism to accept and endorse Jill's nihilism initially but later on he gets more tolerant. She even makes Harry realise that he has withdrawn from life and love because he does not think enough of himself. She tries to analyze Harry's predicament, 'I think that your problem is

that you have never been given a chance to formulate your views. Because of the competitive American context, you've had to convert everything into action too rapidly. Your life has no reflective content, its all instinct, and when your instinct lets you down, you have nothing to trust. That's what makes you so cynical.'[32] She tries to draw Harry out of his passive retreat.

Updike's choice for the epigraph to part three, 'Skeeter' forewarns of the change of tone in the novel. 'we've been raped, we've been raped!'[33]. There is no literal rape in this part, but Skeeter takes over Rabbit's house and the house eventually burns down. The only intrusion is that of Harry's mind. He is exposed to the revolutionary ideas of Jill and Skeeter who indoctrinate him into the world and thoughts that he fears and that he hopes will help him to understand why the world is changing so radically.

Skeeter is one of the most unusual creations of Updike. He is a black Vietnam veteran and Black Movement's activist who wants to overthrow the existing system. There is divided critical opinion on Skeeter. Eugene Lyons who dismisses the whole

32. Ibid., p. 352.

33. Ibid., p. 298.

novel as 'jarring and offensive' comments, 'seldom, if ever, has any white writer been paralyzed into sentimental and self contradictory blather quite so foolish in attempting to deal with a black character.'[34] Robert Alter admits that Updike may strain, the idea of black otherness, but he agrees that the strategy works because the black man's sheer extremeness dazzles the passive Angstrom into attentiveness.[35]

Other characters of the novel too have mixed opinion about Skeeter. Buchanan, Harry's black co-worker criticizes Skeeter's ideas 'These young ones like Skeeter, they say all power to the people, you look around for the people, the only people around them is them,'[36] Babe says that Skeeter hates too much. Skeeter himself accepts at one point that he lacks sympathetic qualities. Even Harry dislikes him initially, but he lets him take shelter in his house because Jill asks him to.

Although Jill and Skeeter share similar views about blacks and war but they represent two opposite idealisms, Skeeter is a revolutionary pragmatist and Jill, a transcendentalist who attaches significance

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34. Lyons, Eugene. **The Beginning and the End,** *Critique,* 14, Spring, 1972, p. 57-58.
35. Alter, Robert, **Updike, Malamud and the Fire This Time** *Commentary,* Oct. 72, p. 73.
36. *Rabbit Redux,* p. 255.

to only one value, love. Although much prejudiced against blacks, Harry accepts Skeeter in the house as he is Jill's friend. Updike makes Harry offer shelter to Skeeter so that he might be exposed to And experience those ideas and attitudes which Jill and Skeeter represent, and which Harry hitherto has feared and despised.

Jill, Skeeter, Harry and Nelson constitute a community with their evening sessions devoted to political thought, revolution and black history. Skeeter reads out the entire history of black oppression by the whites which is one of the reasons for his deep rooted bitterness for the entire white race. Although a political reactionary, his politics has an evangelical and apocalyptic flavour. He believes that the present system has to be overthrown in order to usher forth a new era in which blacks would be the new elite. He sees Vietnam war as the catalyst that will bring about revolution and usher in a new era. It is the necessary turmoil that precedes redemption. Vietnam, is both a sign and symbol of chaos for him, hence like Harry, though for obviously different reasons, he defends the war. He sees Vietnam war not as concrete reality, but abstractly as black hole in space which promises not only infinite contraction but infinite expansion as well, thus promising the

chaos out of which may come new beginning. On the other hand, violence as a fact does not interest him. He says, 'People talk revolution all the time but revolution is not interesting right.'[37] and 'I confess that politics being part of this boring power thing do not much turn me on.'[38]

Ralph C. Wood, however, says that the reason behind Skeeter's pro-war attitude is that he 'hails it for shattering the American dream of specialness.'[39] As Skeeter believes that American experience in Vietnam has exposed it as a cockroach country which he calls the Benighted States. America, according to Skeeter, 'now stands first in one regard only—it is the place where world's acknowledged nothingness has been turned into a cultural and political principle.'[40]

Skeeter rejects all things white, particularly white man's hypocritical religion. He envisages a new religion, in which blackness will be worshipped, because blacks have an inner drive, 'soul' which

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37. Ibid., p. 322.

38. Ibid., p. 344.

39. Wood. Ralph C., **The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists**. South Bend University of Notre Dame Press, 1938 p. 220.

40. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 369.

whites lack. He believes that the millennium will bring a new Jesus who will liberate the world and even compares himself to the new Jesus. The idea of Skeeter being the new Black Jesus has not been taken seriously by some critics while some criticize the comparison as ludicrous and far fetched. Updike comments 'no one's given serious consideration to the idea that Skeeter, the angry black, might be Jesus. He says he is. I think probably he might be.'[41]

Joyce Markle too endorses Updike's views. Markle believes that in *Rabbit Run*, only Harry had a sense of belief with which he could vitalize others. But in *Rabbit Redux*, he is himself a 'dissipated American' in need of a life giver, and this role is assumed by Skeeter, whose hatred and militancy has provided him with values and emotional energy to revitalise others. 'His hostility lends importance and identity to the features of American society....Skeeter calls himself Jesus which is true in novel's terms. He is the only one with beliefs deep enough and a vision of America strong enough to be a priest and life giver'.[42]

41. *Picked-up-Pieces*, p. 510.

42. Markle Joyce, *Fighters and Lovers: Theme in the Novels of John Updike* New York, New York University Press, 1973, p. 148.

However, it is Jill who truly opens both Harry and Nelson to an awareness of God and Christianity but her religion is very different from conventional Christianity. Harry, whose sense of spirituality and belief in the existence of God seems to have dwindled from the earlier novel faces the acute problem of wanting to believe, but he can't get himself up to believing. Jill also perceives God only through her narcotic inspired intuitionism.

However, both Skeeter's revolutionary idealism and Jill's transcendentalism do not make these characters capable of defending themselves against the forces of social righteousness. Harry remains as passive as he was in the preceeding part of the novel. Despite Nelson's and Jill's pleas and the veiled threats of the neighbours, he is simply as uncaring to throw Skeeter's out as he is to his wife's desertion. The result is that the neighbours furious at Jill's and Skeeter's activities burn the house down killing Jill while Harry is away. Jill, the flower child, the love child dies a sacrificial death.

The community of Jill, Skeeter, Nelson and Harry seemed precarious from the outset. It may be seen as Harry's passive revolt against the society and serves the same function as sex and running did in the earlier novel. Although he is a defender

of the status quo, his isolation from society in general is complete when he forms this marginal community. His wife has left him, he has lost his job, he is joined only by Jill and Skeeter who themselves are leading an alienated life. The irony of the situation is that although he hates blacks, he is slow to identify with their sense of isolation simply because he does not fully comprehend what alienation is. Now he realizes the difference between him and the outer world symbolized by the neighbours. He is probably drawn to Skeeter because as Matthew Wilson says, 'he still feels the attraction of disruptive energies, an electricity in Skeeter, and the black man represents an eruption of the demonic in what Rabbit calls 'this stale peace.' Indeed, Rabbit sees him as a reflection of his own abortive revolt ten years before.'[43] Rabbit here revolts by being ambivalent, by allowing things to happen, by creating a mess. This community becomes the last expression of his revolt.

Harry no doubt becomes a little more tolerant towards the black ideas under the influence of Skeeter. He helps Skeeter escape probably because

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43. Wilson, Matthew, **The Rabbit Tetralogy: From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again,** *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol 37, No. 1, Spring 1991 p-12.

he realizes that the United States is not the ideal republic he makes it out to be and that black terrorism often springs from white injustice. Although he does not defend black radicalism, he is now less averse to it. Rabbit's opinion concerning American involvement in Vietnam is slightly altered as well so that although he does not condemn it at the end of the novel, he no longer avidly defends it. As one reviewer writes: 'Rabbit is deeply shaken by the extended encounter with Skeeter, literally and figuratively burned by it, but he plausibly remains more or less what he was .'[44] Donald Greiner observes 'Rabbit understands that alienation, a word he would never use, is not confined to his own sense of isolation. He is not converted from prejudice, but he finds himself less sure of his position.'[45] The fact that Harry and the way of life he represents are affected but not entirely destroyed by the events of the sixties is symbolized by the fire. Although Jill dies in the fire, Rabbit and Nelson are unharmed and the living room and Nelson's room are left intact. The burning of the house marks a partial destruction of those ideals which Rabbit held and which the middle class suburban home represented.

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44. Quoted from Suzanne Henning Uphaus, John Updike New York: Ungar 1980. P.87.

45. Greiner, p., 76.

The final section, titled 'Mim' after Rabbit's high class, call girl sister, begins with another epigraph of sex and space. The family problems of Rabbit in the novel are resolved in this section. In the beginning of the section, Harry's job is phased out as obsolete. He loses his wife, his house and his job. He sadly awakes to the realization how all things are moving faster, except himself. He longs for the world of achievement that he had experienced once, but he has no place to go except for his parent's house. After thirty six years he has come back to the beginning.

Mim acts as deus ex machina in the novel. Mim is someone who has adjusted to the emptiness of the contemporary world, learning to live in it as she has learned to live in the desert. Instead of looking for divine law, she lives by self imposed rules for survival. She is the only character in the novel who has taken advantage of the wide open 60s. She grows while the others, except for Janice, hardly survive. She is the first person to see through the chaos of Angstrom household and is the first person to realize that Janice wants to return home. For the rehabilitation of Harry's family she separates Janice and Charlie by seducing him.

Mim is the only person who acts to rearrange things, since Harry just sits around without even a job to move him, a muddler with no idea about how to get out of his mess. She knows enough about Harry to tell him, 'Every body else has a life they try to fence in with some rules. You just do what you feel like and then when it blows up or runs down you sit there and pout.'[46]

At the end of the novel, bereft of everything, Harry, as Mim says is set free 'You like any kind of disaster that might spring you free.'[47] But this freedom liberates him into nothing, he reconciles with Janice and retreats into domesticity and marriage. Harry in this novel is an ordinary person engaged in an extraodinary affair. By the end of the novel he recognizes, at least dimly, how wrong it is to run away, how destructive it is to flee the life of obligation for the solitary sweetness of one's own will. His mother insists that he leave the unfaithful Janice, seek his own rebirth and not miss his life chance by sitting inert. But Rabbit sees that his dying mother is summoning him to a freedom that is the worst form of death. To run away from family,

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46. *Rabbit Redux*, p. 393.

47. Ibid., p. 391.

job and other responsibilities is not only to kill his own soul but others also. 'He feels she is asking him to kill Janice, to kill Nelson....freedom means murder. Rebirth means death.....(he is) an old lump whose only use is to stay in place to keep the lumps on top of him from stumbling.'[48] Rabbit learns this hard lesson, rather painfully that maturity is not measured by the years one has lived. It is marked by one's willingness to accept responsibility both for one's own life and for those other lives one has been entrusted with. His most significant discovery is the 'Time is our element not a mistaken invader, How stupid, it has taken him thirty six years to believe that.'[49]

Uphaus says that in *Rabbit Redux* 'Updike portrays Rabbit's return to the past, where he finds a relative stability.'[50] Rabbit's return to Janice is also a return to past. He has regained old Rabbit energies and symbolically enough, ends up wearing his old high school jacket found at his parent's home.

Both Harry and Janice acknowledge that they are linked inextricably in the knot called life. Rabbit

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48. Ibid p. 294.

49. Ibid.

50. Uphaus, p.88.

feels guilty for every thing. These words of accepting guilt reveal how far he has advanced over his earlier claims that everybody is a victim and thus he is responsible for nothing. He abandons quest for upward spaces and makes up with the person who first drove him to run. He has really been led back.

Chapter-4

RABBIT IS RICH

The first novel of the Rabbit quartet was an account of Rabbit's revolt against the constrictions of society, the second, an attempt to reconcile to that milieu which he had despised and fled from earlier, although the consequences of his attempted reconciliation are rather disastrous. The third novel in the series reports the success story of Harry as a man of this world, successfully incorporated into it. Rabbit at 46, in *Rabbit is Rich* is described by Updike as 'hearty and huge' serene in his middle years. Rabbit at middle age has mellowed down and a few changes can also be discerned in his general outlook. Now he has different and less fierce desires. His cravings, selfish, angry and violent self of young adulthood have dwindled. In early novels what Rabbit feared was not actual death or worse, death in the guise of monogamy but what he then resisted– a hated routine without the possibility of change. Now he sees change even amid the familiar. By now life has taught him that there are worse things than being bored.

However, this development has taken ten year's time. *Rabbit Redux* was full of dread and confusion. The world looked pale to him and nothing in it

could provide him with equanimity. He had withdrawn into passivity which drew him almost to the point of moral imbecility. Moreover, the plot of Rabbit Redux was unkind to him. He had to deal with a dying mother, an adulterous wife, a failing work situation, a burnt out house, a dead girlfriend and a frightened son who later on turned hostile. Ten years had passed since baby Becky died, yet he was not able to get over the guilt and his relationship with Janice had become `too dark.. too kindred to death'[1] By *Rabbit is Rich*, the old anger, fear and guilt are gone and Harry's world has become a lot more peaceful without its sinister turns of events, its disasters, betrayals and violent deaths. Thomas Edwards rightly observes, '*Rabbit is Rich* is a story of disasters averted....Updike teases us into anticipating tragedies that never quite occur.'[2]

Harry has made substantial financial progress since the last novel. In the intervening period he has inherited his father-in- law's Toyota agency; his style of living has undergone a remarkable change. The oil crisis that rocked the 80s benefits him as his low mileage Toyotas are in considerable demand.

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1. Op.cit. Chap III.
2. Edwards, Thomas, **Updike's Rabbit Trilogy,** *Atlantic,* Vol. 248, Oct,1981, p. 100.

As a businessman, he is more aware than he has been in the previous two novels of what is happening to the nation and the world at large. Harry enjoys a solid citizen status, he has become a man of consequence in his town, ' he likes the nod he gets from the community, that overlooked him like dirt since high school.'[3] . Ironically and inadvertently he has gone back to being the 'star and spearpoint' `the man upfront',[4] and again he has the approval of the society. In the earlier novels there was no way for him to integrate himself in the society. In the absence of that adulation that he enjoyed in high school, he becomes a lonely figure, constantly affronting and confronting his society. Now he not only has a social status but has also become resolutely social, a part of a circle of friends and acquaintances. This is the most radical change in the *Rabbit* novels, for in the previous two, Rabbit is projected as the solitary American hero, seeking to evade the constraints of society which offered him no outlet for his disruptive energies. Now, however, his very definition of freedom has changed. He realizes that `the stifled terror that always made

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3. Updike John, *Rabbit Is Rich*, A Rabbit Omnibus, Penguin Books, 1991. p. 418.

4. Ibid.

him restless has dulled down. He wants less. 'Freedom, that he always thought was outward motion, turns out to be this inner dwindling'[5] Giving up outward motion, his energies dwindle and he plants himself in society. Harry's passion for baskteball is also replaced by golf which is in tune with his expanding waistline and newly acquired social status. A member of the posh suburban club, he spends his leisure time playing golf and sunbathing with his new friends. Thus, in this novel Harry emerges as a more social and compromising being making adjustments not only with Janice and her mother whom he once despised, but with the society as a whole.

'For the first time since childhood Rabbit is happy, simply to be alive'[6] Harry sees life as 'just beginning, on a clear ground at last, now that he has a margin of resources.[7]' In *Rabbit, Run* he had fled from his wife but now submits to the norms of family life: 'Rabbit is content. This is what he likes, domestic peace. Women circling with dutiful footsteps above him and the summer night like a

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5. Ibid., p. 475.
6. Ibid., p. 421.
7. Ibid., p. 475.

lake lapping at the windows'[8] Home in *Rabbit, Run* is suffocating but now at middle age Harry tolerates restriction. Harry has begun to enjoy what Updike calls, 'relative happiness and freedom from tension that you might find in your 40s.'[9]

Rabbit echoes Sinclair Lewis's character Babbitt, whom Updike quotes in the epigraph. Babbitt is Lewis's satire on middle America. The quotation is Babbitt's definition of the ideal citizen, he is the naive and vaguely unfulfilled man who exchanged ideas for cigars, experiences for routine and then settles down to some putting practice and a good meal. Harry's life too has sunk to this routine and mediocrity. The other epigraph is a quotation from Wallace Steven's poem *A Rabbit as king of the ghosts*. The poem depicts a rabbit who disappointed with his status in the real world, creates a perfect world in his imagination in which he rises to a heroic stature.

Harry apparently looks happy and satisfied, but, in fact, inspite of this economic independence, gold and satisfactory life with Janice, he seems troubled

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8. Ibid., p. 465.

9. Kakutani Michiko, **Turning Sex & Guilt Into an American Epic**, *Saturday Review*. Oct 1981, p. 15

by the emptiness of his life, by its lack of excitement and interest and by his incapacity to understand the forces that determine its tenor. He feels a need to run away, though the need is not as urgent as before. He muses on the entire squeezed and cut down shape of his life and realizes he is middle aged, an age where dreams decline to an awareness of limits. He lives his daily life with a strict pragmatic approach trying to serve his business as much as possible. He reads no books except *consumer reports* and his talk with his friends is also about money, income tax or some silly newspaper story. His life and association with friends makes him uneasy but his flight in this novel is not so urgent as in *Rabbit, Run* and thus not so poignant.

Rabbit is faced with the pressures of reality, the baseness of existence. As Donalds Greiner says. 'The ironic soaring of the rocket in *Rabbit Redux* is gone, no one is soaring towards moon in *Rabbit is Rich*, each person is just trying to hang on'[10]. The novel starts with cliches of decline. 'Running out of gas..[11]' the first words of the novel sound like a metaphor for middle age, depleting energy.

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10. Greiner Donald, **John Updike's Novels**, Athens, Ohio University Press, p.

11. *Rabbit is Rich*, p. 418.

'Running' no longer means the anguished search of an unseen world. The statement refers both to America, which is running dry because of the oil crisis and to Harry, because of loss of sexual energy. But Harry can be satisfied on one account, his financial stability. 'Having enough at last has made him satisfied all over'[12]. Money matters more in *Rabbit is Rich* because of the ways in which Harry values it. Updike shows how he uses it to measure his distance from his family's sad and impoverished status. A rich man now, Harry holidays in Poconos, a lake resort where the family owns a cottage and recalls his family's poor outings when he was a kid that used to end in a fiasco. The outings smelled of depreciation and filled Harry with disgust. Harry now takes satisfaction in the fact that his father would never have imagined him living so well.

The book is pervaded by a sort of stillness and calm, it is less vigorous than the previous books. Michiko Kakutani says, "Instead of charting, as he did in the previous books, Rabbit's growth and his struggles against the temper of the times, Updike

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12. Ibid., p. 445.

now seems more interested in delineating his character's state of mind.' This impulse is appropriate to Harry's condition as 'Middle age, after all, is a period of consolidation of stock taking, of statis even, and its peculiar tone and texture are here subtly evoked'[13]. Rabbit in *Rabbit is Rich* emerges as a thinking man, his focus is once more on the needs of the self. Religious speculation and political concerns give way to interior monologues, which are mostly about economic practicability. OPEL'S prices and devaluation of the dollar are in news but Harry discusses them only in so far as they affect his business. Other social details like Pope's visit to the United States, Iran's hostage crisis are closely followed. Spiritually however, it is a stagnant age. Except for a few thoughts about the dead, Harry does not much indulge in spiritual concerns. His response to the world is in fact guided by *Consumer Reports*, which is quoted like a chorus in the background of a gas short world. Thomas Mallon observes 'Updike has in this book caught both the flotsam and the ethos of 1979 with even more exactitude than he bottled 1957 in *Rabbit, Run* and 1969 in *Rabbit Redux*.'[14]

13. Kakutani, p. 14

14. Mallon. Thomas, **Rabbit, Jog**, *National Review* Nov. 13, 1981, p. 1356.

Harry's apparent happiness and complacency is not entirely without some dissatisfaction. Updike once remarked, "a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, a content person ceases to exist. Unfalling Adam is an ape."[15] About Harry's contentment Updike has remarked, 'There's a moment in the organism when its thrust outward into the world and the call to mate and the need to make your mark no longer clamour at you, but the body hasn't quite begun to collapse, so in a strange way its kind of a happy moment.'[16] This happiness is marred by a 'spiritual discomfort' that comes 'with the quiescence of middle age."[17] What keeps Harry fallen and dissatisfied here is sex and paternity. Harry lusts after a younger wife in his social circle and he worries over his strained relationship with his son and thinks about a girl who could be a child he has fathered by Ruth.

In *Rabbit Redux*, Harry associated sex with Janice with death; it reminded him of his dead daughter causing a feeling of guilt. In *Rabbit is Rich*, Harry's indifference towards sex and Janice

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15. Updike. John, *Picked-up-Pieces*, New York, *Alfred Knopf*, 1975, p. 504.

16. Kakutani, p. 15.

17. Ibid., p. 15.

is gone. The two of them even admit an attraction for each other. Since Janice can no more have children, the fear of death that Harry associated with procreation is gone as well Finally, with the safe birth of Nelson's baby daughter, procreation is finally disengaged from death. Now that he has managed to divorce it from death, the anguish attached with it is lost forever. In *Rabbit, Run* sex had a metaphysical dimension and Rabbit equated it with a striving to achieve upward spaces and unseen worlds, but it only brought him worthless achievement because the real always fell short of the ideal causing pain to himself and others. The situation has completely reversed in *Rabbit is Rich.*

Harry had earlier associated monogamy with dying. Monogamy had been the known road which he shunned. Novelty and sensation were given importance and these could be achieved only through adultery as Piet Hanema in *Couples* defends adultery, "It's a way of giving yourself adventures, of getting out in the world and seeking knowledge".[18] The most striking difference in *Rabbit is Rich* is that Harry no longer frightens himself with his promiscuity and its consequences, he has become

18. Updike, John, *Couples,* New York, Alfred Knopf, 1968, p. 343.

rather timid. In the first novel he was rather selfish towards Janice after the birth of their baby, now, however, the narcissist sexual side of Harry has dwindled.

Despite this dwindling and the tinge of existential gloom that pervades the novel and Harry's acceptance of the inherent ambiguity of human existence, he is still willing to seek sexual adventure in order to overcome the tedium of the predictable. Because Janice is unable to have children, relationship with her has lost an edge. Harry's thoughts keep on drifting back to Ruth and his classmate in ninth grade. Mathew Wilson says that 'sex is not a mode of revolt or escape in the novel; it is a regression into fantasy."[19] Harry also keeps thinking about Cindy Murkett, the young wife of one of his golf partners. His obsession for Cindy shows that he has not left scampering altogether. Young and confident, Cindy becomes his dream woman. It seems Harry's quest for unseen worlds has ironically narrowed down to Cindy as Donald Greiner remarks, "unobtainable Cindy represents mystery to Harry, evidence for himself as well as the reader that his

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19. Wilson Matthew, **The Rabbit Tetralogy : From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again**, *MFS*, Vol. 37, No. 1. Spring 1991. p. 14.

longing of the unknown has not totally bogged down in expanding waistlines and safe routine."[20]

When, during an episode of wife swapping on a Caribbean vacation, it seems Harry's fantasy would be fulfilled, he ironically and comically gets the wrong wife. Griener rightly observes, 'Harry doesn't get Cindy, just as he doesn't reach the upward spaces except with a tee shot... Updike knows his man. To grant him the rainbow would be to halt his run. Even at age forty six, Rabbit has a lot of running left."[21] However, the failure to get Cindy brings only disappointment, not despair. Janice once says to her husband, "You always want what you don't have instead of what you do."[22] Although the remark is made when Harry confides to her his conjecture about an illegitimate daughter, it is true in this regard as well.

What makes Harry 'rabbity' in his responses is that he refuses to be pinned down. But now at least he can define roughly what he wants. In the early novels he cannot describe the object of his frantic quest except to the point of the perfect tee shot.

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20. Greiner Donald, *John Updike's Novels*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 1994, p. 92

21. Greiner, p. 93.

22. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 456.

But the years and the pounds and the comfort of money have combined to readjust his sight closer to earth: a home of his own, a life without Nelson, a real daughter, and Cindy. But at the same time, if Harry is not able to describe the object of his desire in *Rabbit, Run* its because the object is abstract, it has a spiritual dimension, vague sense of some power that wants him to find it. Whereas sexually and spiritually dwindled Harry in *Rabbit is Rich* has calmed down by material comforts and his longings too are for objects real and tangible.

Although Rabbit seeks adventures outside matrimony, he is bound to Janice perennially. Despite his wayward murderous thoughts about Janice, the reason why he has accepted her is that the dumb mutt, Janice of earlier books shows here some mid-life wisdom, easiness and energy that Harry feels he lacks. When he thinks about her as an individual, he accepts her superiority without anger. 'She has had a lot of lessons. The decade past her has taught her more than it has taught him."[23] Their relative positions have changed. Janice comes up with more possible solutions to their problems and also has mature answers for Harry's queries. 'It sometimes startles Harry how smooth Janice can be in her

23. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 487

middle age.'[24] When they talk about their son Nelson or any other personal matter, he is the ignorant questioner, she the one with the answers. When he tries to sound adult, affectionate, paternal—tones Janice manages easily—he thinks he sounds like an impersonator. He even admires her physically. Whereas Harry has slackened down and bloated with a forty two inch waist, Janice has managed to remain slim and energetic by playing tennis regularly.

In M.M. Gullette words 'Having taught himself, like a reader of mid-life decline novels, to expect nothing much from matrimony but burdens, Harry is surprised to be soothed by their' ''connivance''.[25] He trusts her so much that he even confides in her his conjecture of having an illegitimate daughter. She in turn forgives him for his other longings. Marriage no more constricts him, but in a way frees him so that he finally feels, 'not for the first time in twenty years plus...a furtive rush of loving her, caught with him as she is in the narrow places life affords.'[26] He even admits that she is his fortune; and realises that he is married to her for good.

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24. *Rabbit Is Rich,* p. 498.

25. Gullette, M., *Safe at Last in the Middle Years,* Berkley, University of California Press, 1988, p. 202.

26. *Rabbit is Rich* p. 568.

Running is for adolescents, adults put up with their fate. 'Once when she got like this (flustered frowny, grieved), her fear contaminated him and he ran; but in these middle years, it is so clear to him that he will never run that he can laugh at her, his stubborn prize.'[27]

Harry's problems in his middle years are not theological, political or even economic. His problems are of personal nature. Griener opines `It seems as if Rabbit's instinctive surge for life has burned out. He is too young to call it quits, but he may be too old to keep it up. The prospect is both sad and frightening, for his internal life shrinks as his external circumstances expand."[28] He himself is aware of his diminishing spiritual life. `... a lot of topics, he has noticed lately, in private conversation...run dry, exhaust themselves as if everything's been said in this hemisphere. In his inner life too, Rabbit dodges among more blanks than there used to be, patches of burnt out gray cells where there used to be lust and keen dreaming and wide eyed dread.'[29] It is because of these blanks in his spirit, the insatiable craving of the spirit that

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27. Ibid., p. 622

28. Greiner, p. 91.

29. *Rabbit Is Rich.*, p. 423.

makes him think that the girl who walks into his agency is his illegitimate daughter. This craving of the self, although substantially shrunk from the days of his youth, nevertheless exerts itself at times, that makes Harry uncomfortable and he aspires for something more than his ordinary mortal existence. Harry senses his need for a quest and thinks that an illegitimate daughter in exchange for a dead one would be a sort of blessing from immortality. But unlike young Rabbit he doesn't rush toward his goal of finding out his daughter, but his efforts are slow.

Drifting into middle age, Harry might not be able to relocate his search for upward spaces, but he is confronted with an additional dimension of life with which he had hitherto been unconcerned i.e. Death. Gradually he becomes aware how his life is not only his but infected with a spooky presence of the dead. The novel moves from light hearted comedy of Harry lusting after Cindy to what William Pritchard calls 'a rather elegant and sad poetry of the spirit, particularly the spirits of the dead who surround and haunt our protagonist'.[30] Harry muses, 'The dead, Jesus. They were multiplying and they look up begging you to join them, providing it is

30. Pritchard William, **In Clover**, *The New Republic*, Vol. 185, 30 Sept. 1981, p. 30

all right....Pop, Mom old man Springer, Jill, the baby called Becky... The obituary page everyday shows another stack of a harvest endlessly rich.."[31]

Not only does he think of his dead relations but is plunged into depression at the thought that," every blade of grass at his feet is an individual life that will die, that has flourished to no purpose.[32] The lines recall young Harry's belief in the tree and the stone and in God's gift of "special talents". The reflection fails to bring any solace to Harry who finds that not even a game of golf can rouse him from his existential gloom. The golf has become more like work and has lost its metaphysical function. Foreboding of his own mortality moves through the latter half of the book as earlier the family used to worry about his running away, now when he takes up jogging, they worry about his heart. He is more death conscious than ever, thinking constantly of all the corpse that lie under the ground he treads. Reading of Skeeter's death in a shoot out, recalling Becky's death by drowning, Jill's death in fire, he ponders over the inescapable guilt of his life. 'There's no getting away; our sins, our seed, coil

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31. *Rabbit Is Rich* p. 424.

32. Ibid., p. 437.

back.'[33] The scent of mortality pervades the whole novel. Beneath all the profit, security and fun, behind all the glow of middle age and the sense that life is fun, lurks the leer of death. At the beginning of the novel, he doesn't want to face it directly but has a foreboding of its ominous presence. However, Harry doesn't want to contemplate his own ending. Griener says, 'Money allows him to accept his now limited inner spaces so that his need to wander is partly thwarted and he hopes that the beginning of his comfort signals the beginning of his life.'[34]

George Hunt, however feels that Harry's sense of the dead's presence is in fact a `communion (that) provides his life with continuity and comparsion.'[35] Although Harry is not so pious `he still retains his sense of miracle of being himself, himself instead of somebody else and his old inkling now fading in the energy crunch, that there was something that wanted him to find it, that he was here on earth on a kind of assignment.'[36] Now his interest in God

33. Ibid., p. 590.

34. Greiner., p. 96.

35. Hunt George, **Updike's Rabbit Returns**, *America*, 145, Nov. 21, 1981-p.322.

36. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 567.

flares only occasionally. In *Rabbit, Run*, Harry is called a mystic, here Updike seems to suggest that Harry might push beyond the emptiness of his material life. His belief in God is sporadic, for example, he welcomes rain because it represents 'the last proof left to him that God exists.'[37] Again, when he leaves for vacation in the Caribbean, he feels hope and propulsion towards God who, "having shrunk in Harry's middle years to the size of a raisin lost under the car seat, is suddenly great again, everywhere like a radiant wind.'[38]

In his youth basketball was his passion which he often associated with sex, and a perfect shot of golf, a corroboration of his spiritual moorings. In *Rabbit is Rich* Harry has taken up golf again, but he plays the game neither in desire to hit the perfect mystical drive, nor in conformity to the leisured life he leads. He enjoys golf because it echoes the elusive mystery of human existence. It is like life itself, Harry says, 'Its performance cannot be forced, and its underlying principle shies from being permanently named.'[39]

The novel in the first part, introduces us to Harry's run of the mill existence at 46, his major

38. Ibid., p. 468.

39. Ibid., p. 531

preoccupation being worrying about his money, enjoying life and golf and thinking about Cindy. The unexpected arrival of Nelson in Brewer leads to unexpected turn of events. A college dropout, Nelson comes back with the intention of working at his father's Toyota Agency. Nelson further adds to his father's worries about losing his money. His obsession with money leads to comic results especially when on Web Murkett's advice he turns his money into gold, in the wake of the devaluation of the dollar. Then he changes his kruggerands into silver in fear that the price of gold will fall. Nelson's arrival aggravates Harry's dread. Though old enough to establish his own independence, Nelson still lives at home, and struggles to finish college. His irresponsible nature is exceedingly irksome to Harry. He grumbles at his son's generation. Having being reared on television, they know nothing first hand. He even feels his fortune being jeopardized by this generation.

The deep antagonism between Nelson and his father dates back to the night when their house was burnt down killing Jill. Nelson holds Harry responsible for Jill's death as well as the death of his baby sister Becky. Nelson's grievance against his father is more because Harry seems to have come to terms

with the past, and he will not allow past disasters to disrupt his present success. Nelson, on the other hand, cannot forget his past and throughout the book acts against his father; by dropping out of college, by smashing one by one Harry's cars and by marrying against his father's wishes. He feels almost suffocated by his father. Nelson says, 'He is forgotten everything he ever did to us . . . He's so smug and satisfied, is what gets me. [40] Harry too takes a perverse delight in Nelson's opposition as he confides to Janice ''I like having Nelson in the house. Its great to have an enemy. Sharpens your senses''.[41] In fact, his relationship with Nelson has deteriorated so much that he unconsciously wants another child and it is only the reason why he fantasizes about having a daughter.

Harry's dislike of Nelson is also because he feels his mid-life comfort threatened by his presence. What Harry really hates is Nelson's lack of coordination, a balance and order, the same flaw that he finds in Janice. Even Ma Springer who loves and defends Nelson admits that the boy has not turned out the way she and her dead husband had hoped. On the surface of it, it seems that Nelson

40. *Rabbit is Rich*, p. 570.

41. Ibid p. 481.

commits the same mistakes as Harry. If Harry is responsible for the death of his infant daughter in *Rabbit, Run,* Nelson almost kills the baby his wife Pru is carrying. In a siege of anger at the drunken Pru, Nelson half pushes her, half watches her fall down a steep flight of stairs. But unlike *Rabbit, Run* both mother and child are spared. Then he flees as his father had done, deserting his new bride three days before their baby is born.

Similarly, Nelson like his father is compelled to marry Pru after she gets pregnant. Nelson faces the same choice that Harry did when he was young but for Harry there was no choice. Now he doesn't want his son to rush into marriage and feel trapped later on. He suggests his son to run away and even offers him money. Although his desire for Nelson to go away is self serving, as he would like to get rid of Nelson at any cost, he does see his son as himself, "I just don't like seeing you caught You're too much me"[42]. But Nelson refuses all help from his father and goes through his marriage. Although he doesn't flee at the wedding, Nelson eventually does run, deserting his wife but unlike his father he doesn't run in circles, he goes back to his college

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42. *Rabbit Is Rich* p.

to finish his degree. Thomas Edwards is of the opinion that like his father, ' Nelson too is frigntened by the demands of maturity and human obligation and he too is a runner, but both his behaviour and Updike's incursions into his consciousness reveal not Harry's hopeful interest in the terms of his own life but a cynical, surly, grasping, thoroughly stupid, and unimaginative self concern that is not like Harry at all.'[43] Moreover, Nelson utterly lacks grace; which had been the outstanding force of Harry's life. According to Greiner 'Taking the son through many of the physical misadventures of the father, Updike denies him the spiritual qualities that make such bumbling simultaneously reprehensible and appealing.'[44] Nelson mimics Harry's stumble without grace. No one is going to say about Nelson that he has the gift of life or that he gives people faith. He is too complaining and too irresponsible. He has no sense of magic, no need for quest. Harry clumsily loves him but wants him out of his way. His presence in the house increases his fear of being crowded and intensifies his desperation for a home of his own. Nelson plays the role of Skeeter in *Rabbit is Rich*, continuously threatening Harry's

43. Edwards, pp. 100-101

44. Greiner p. 93.

peace of mind and sense of solidarity. Melanie rightly tells him that he lacks a 'capacity for responsibility'. His irresponsible and heedless nature is sufficiently made clear by his capacity to wreck cars. After swashing Rabbit's Corona, he doesn't care beyond embarrassment because he says there are no injuries. When Harry looks grieved and concerned, Nelson gets impatient. This attitude is in striking contrast to Harry's character who despite of being rich, cannot overcome his habit of saving. Even while choosing between a packet of peanuts and cashews, he considers money.

Nelson requests for a job at his father's agency. Arrogance motivates him to join in sales and he refuses to work with other workers. Although he is totally unsuitable for the job, given his inability to smile, and perpetual whine and short tempered nature, the family specially Janice and her mother feel that they own him the same chance they once gave to Harry. Taking no heed to Harry's vehement opposition, Becky Springer secures him a job at the lot, by asking Charlie the most experienced worker to make space for him.

Nelson gets his chance to sell cars when he works at the agency during Harry's vacation at

Poconos. He tries to prove himself as a salesman by remarketing ancient gas consuming convertibles during oil crunch. Harry is enraged at his son's commercial ineptitude and the son is infuriated at his father's repeated attempts to humiliate him. Finally, it is not rage but pity Harry pours out upon Nelson as he feels his son's prospects are blighted from the start. His world is already worn out before he can find a place in it.

The bleaker aspects of the novel are brightened by Pru's arrival as a ray of hope for the family. When she arrives pregnant and lonely, Harry surges to protect her. Although Pru's presence makes Nelson more docile, he is as selfish as ever, as he says that he will go through the wedding because he has said he will. Nelson is not only insolent and impudent with his parents, he has complaints against Pru as she does not go out with him often. In this part of the novel there is an occasional switch to Nelsons point of view. Here he pours out his grudges against his father to Pru. His overbearing complaints, however, fail to evoke any sympathy for him from the readers.

Hope comes in the novel with Pru's baby. More death conscious than ever, Harry is overwhelmed by

the idea of continuing his immortality through his seed. He believes that he may still be life giver through his son. Nelson is a sad option as he does not believe in God and spirituality. This makes him renew his search for Annabel, his illegitimate daughter which however ends in disappointment as Ruth denies that Annabel is his daughter. Now his attention switches over to Pru's baby and to a house of his own. 'Her pregnancy promises him a stay against the insistent crowding of the dead.'[45]

At forty seven, he decides that he needs his own house. Although his mother-in-law and Nelson are opposed to the decision, Harry is adamant. The house becomes constricting for him with Nelson around and he realizes that without space and privacy his life will shrink further. Moving into the house, he sees new promise in a life that has been withering too long. He is finally king of his own burrow: no mother-in-law, no Skeeter, no Jill, no Nelson, no trap. When read in isolation this seems to suggest the same move towards freedom of the previous two novels. When read as a sequel we come to the conclusion that the move tends to send Harry more deeply in to the matrix of society. Harry

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45. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 496

is clearly domesticated unlike the Rabbit of *Rabbit, Run*. Rabbit in this novel discovers such freedom inside his own home's security.

All he needs now is Pru's baby to take place of the daughter he cannot have and the son he does not like. The baby , a girl, fills the void and at 46, Harry a former rebel looks around and finds himself a grandfather. The baby makes him glance at his own mortality, it promises a future but in a dual sense. 'Fortune's hostage, heart's desire, a granddaughter. His. Another nail in his coffin. His.' [47] It speaks of the death of Harry. He realises that the old have to make place for the young. Harry understands it but does not run, rather he contemplates the truth that the dead crowd him more closely than the living have ever done. Harry's death and continuity are assured in the same sentence. Even as he gets ready for his death the baby assures his continuity.

Ralph Wood rightly says 'Updike has brought his epic character a long way indeed. From Rabbit the scared and solipsistic youth fleeing life's limits to Harry the middle aged grandfather reluctantly accepting

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46. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 504.

47. *Rabbit Is Rich*, p. 700.

life's essential ambiguity.'[48] Harry ponders the significance of his life; 'In middle age you are carrying the world and yet it seems out of control more than ever, the self that you had as a boy all scattered and distributed like those pieces of bread in the miracle.'[48] Harry sees that his life is broken in order that others might find sustenance in him. His failure to hold fast to his youthful vision of himself as hero is much more a blessing than a curse.

Dilvo Ristoff, however, finds no pattern of hope in the novel, 'it is hard to find any indication of hope in *Rabbit is Rich*.' Nelson, Ristoff feels is only a disappointment in all respects. 'The birth of Nelson's daughter at the end of the novel is insufficiently explored for us to be able to say that she represents beyond the known future,' at the moment 'she is no doubt on the train of America, but she is a light in the caboose illuminating nothing except herself.'[49] Further he states that 'Updike's negativism seems to be expressed... in Rabbit's extravagant home.... (it) seems to indicate Harry has

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48. Wood Ralph, **John Updike's Rabbit Saga**, *The Christian Century*, Vol-99, Jan 20, 1982, p. 54

49. Ristoff, p. 140.

definitely jumped on the bandwagon of waste and superfluousness'.[50]

The narrative frame of the novel for the most part is cast in present tense like the early novels of the sequel. Rabbit's singular point of view is maintained except for the concluding part in which there is a shift to Nelson's point of view. The novel records Rabbit's sensations, distractions, reflection and speculation. The narrative mode is less self conscious and is given sensory rather than psychological emphasis. The plot is diffuse with multiple movements and the tragedies that lurk around are all withdrawn towards the end. Updike maintains a link with early novels by frequently bringing up Harry's past in *Rabbit is Rich*. His glorious achievement as a basketball star more than twenty years ago are present as yellowed newspaper clippings in frame in his office. Harry's past experiences are constantly evaluated in the light of present events and circumstances especially when Nelson emulates his father's experiences. Also in his memory, Harry remembers everything , new experiences acquire their meaning by becoming in his mind, a celebration of, or an elegy for something

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50. Ibid p. 140.

past, a process of recollection in which nothing is ever truly lost.

However there is little development in the character of Harry as an individual with the onset of middle age. George Hunt believes that 'Rabbit's life, a representative American life, is itself a sequel, that he has not all changed in a radical way since high school, that his values and aspirations, fears and sexual preoccupations are themselves Redux and unaltered.'[51] Since 1959, Rabbit is neither better nor worse, neither wiser nor more idiotic. His frame of mind, his thought structure, his underlying motivations are astonishingly similar in older and richer Rabbit, in an America faced with different realities The spiritual diminishment that he started discerning in *Rabbit, Run* is now killing him. His tragedy is that he has not grown intellectually in the intervening decades and remains victim of more or less the same beliefs and illusions that guided his life earlier. His belief in the established institutions remains the same as in *Rabbit Redux* although he doesn't indulge into hot debates defending it.

The difference that comes in Harry's general outlook is the diminishment of his spiritual self and

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51. Hunt. p. 321.

energy and his affluence which results in his acceptance of domestication and a falling off of his faith in his own uniqueness. With middle age he realizes that "furious running is better than gracious plodding.'[52] Although he still complains about the world enclosing him, but his rage lacks the old bitterness and deception and he learns to find liberation in obligation. Though he still obsesses with romantic longings, he sees that he must live in the muddled midground between pleasure and responsibility.

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52. Wood Ralph, **The Comedy of Redemption: Christian Faith and Comic Vision in Four American Novelists,** South Bend; University of Notre Dame Press. 1986 p. 227.

Chapter-5

RABBIT AT REST

Updike once remarked about *Rabbit at Rest* "it's a depressed book about a depressed man written by a depressed man.[1]" After a rather cheerful book *Rabbit Is Rich*, which Updike himself says is an 'upbeat book' despite the gas crunch and other problems, *Rabbit at Rest* portrays the dull life of a retired Harry, a chronicle of his steady disempowerment. The novel records the slow downward plunge of Harry's life. *Rabbit at Rest* opens with Harry at 55, physically deteriorated, a junk food addict and seriously overweight; and in the course of the novel he suffers two heart attacks, the second one killing him.

Now that he is superannuated, he increasingly becomes aware of his mortality. Harry had already become rich in the preceding novel, now we find him and Janice owners of an apartment in a Florida condominium where they spend half the year. In the intervening years, Nelson has taken over the responsibility of the Toyota lot, relieving Harry of almost all family responsibilities. Harry is not altogether happy with this development, although Janice is doing well. Tennis and swimming have kept her relatively

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1. Updike John **Why Rabbit had to go**, *The New York Times Book Review*; Aug 5; 1999. p. 1.

young and active while Harry has slowed down and is aware of unusual moments inside his chest, although he continues to ignore this warning.

Harry right from his first flight in *Rabbit, Run* had wanted to escape to Florida and as the novel opens, Harry seems at last to have escaped Mt Judge. But Harry cannot really escape as the problems created by Nelson demand his return to Brewer. Nervous and twitchy, the Nelson of *Rabbit Is Rich* has taken an addiction to drugs and to feed his requirement, he has been stealing from the agency, taking it almost to the brink of bankruptcy. Harry has to temporarily return to the lot for a few months while Nelson is away at a rehabilitation center. Apart from the domestic crisis the plot is dominated by the death motif.

Right from the beginning of the sequels, the end of the Rabbit saga, with the death of Rabbit seems inevitable. The novel opens with Harry suffering from angina pains and closes with him lying minutes away from death after his second massive heart attack. In the stretch between these situations, Updike gradually reveals the direction that the saga of Harry, chronicled in three novels composed over a period of thirty years, has headed for. In the fourth novel, an overriding

preoccupation with mortality provides the text with an extra dimension that the previous books, though they too were not strangers to death, lacked. In the shadow of death, Harry's life resolves itself as a subtle tragedy.

The novel has a courageous theme--the blossoming and fruition of the seed of death we all carry inside us. This theme is struck in the first sentence itself. As Harry waits for the plane bringing Nelson and his family to Florida, 'Rabbit Angstrom has a funny sudden feeling that what he has come to meet is not his son Nelson and daughter-in-law Pru and their two children but something more ominous and intricately his: his own death, shaped vaguely like an aeroplane.'[2] This early note reverberates throughout the novel and invests its domestic crisis story with pathos. The novel is a departure from the previous novels in which Updike explored the human body as eros, especially in *Couples*, he now explores the body as thanatos. Doomed Harry Angstrom has a panicky sense of the body's finitude and of its place in a world of other competing bodies, 'you fill a slot for a time and than move out; that's the decent thing to do: make room.'[3]

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2. Updike John, *Rabbit at Rest,* Penguin Books, 1991, p. 3.

3. *Rabbit at Rest,* p. 371.

Death as a recurring motif had started appearing in *Rabbit Is Rich*, but Harry was only conscious of the simultaneous presence of the dead with the living, together with a consciousness of everything from grass under his feet to a tree having life. Harry hardly ever thinks of his own death and if he ever does, he perceives it only in a vague sense. In *Rabbit at Rest* we discover him with an acute sense of his own limits as a human being. The metaphors of the novel — chief being an airplane with bomb in it, represent Harry with an unwell heart inside him—convey from the beginning of the novel a connection not only of Harry's impending doom but of its inevitability. Throughout the novel, Harry is obsessed with the Lockerbie air disaster, with the declining powers of baseball players and the deaths of TV personalities. In Florida, he notes that 'palms grow by the lower branches dying and dropping off'[4]; that 'friendship has a thin provisional quality, since people might at any minute buy another condominium and move to it, or else up and die,'[5] The music at the airport where he goes to receive Nelson and his family is 'a kind of carpet in the air, to cover up a silence that might remind you of death'[6] Even before he suffers his first

4. Ibid., p. 59.
5. Ibid., p. 73
6. Ibid., p.4.

heart attack, Harry has nothing to live for except food and sexual fantasy, and after the attack he ceases to believe in his own future and even of its desirability. He refuses bypass surgery and loses himself in reveries and self pity and becomes more passive than ever. Half consciously he is preparing himself for death.

Rabbit at Rest gives the vision of a man who looks out at the world in which he soon will not exist. Step by step, Harry's family, unconsciously perhaps, prepares itself to survive him, his wife and son making decisions about the family business that leave him out. Janice leaves her two decades' country club indolence and emerges energized and business like. Harry cannot help noting that 'there is this subtle past tense that keeps creeping in her remarks about him.'[7] Janice looks forward to become a career woman and takes up a course in real estate, makes plans to sell the condo and their house in Penn Park and to move into her parent's house with Nelson's family. Harry admires her new found competence but senses in it a preparation for widowhood.

Harry suffers his first attack while rescuing his grand daughter Judy from drowning. After he undergoes angioplasty, he is least careful of his eating habits and other precautions. Towards the end of the novel he

7. Ibid., p.363.

drives away from his home to Florida as in the first novel. He meets his end in a basketball match played with a few kids leading to the second massive attack.

Mathew Wilson observes that 'Harry's physical degeneration, however, is only a sign among many of how he has been thrown back, almost without his understanding how it has happened into a solitude even more isolating than that he experienced as a young man in *Rabbit, Run*.'[8] Along with his physical degeneration, dininishing sexual energy and his retirement contribute to his sense of alienation. He is deprived of the milieu of work and a social circle. Since Nelson has been managing the lot, he has been rendered jobless and left with an even more constricting identity. Earlier on, he had a feeling of being a man of some importance, a 'man up front'[9] at the lot. Charlie Stavros, his co-worker was a confidant and friend with whom he had a kind of sustaining male social interaction. Now because of his shifting to Florida, they rarely see each other. He meets his group from Flying Eagle country club even more infrequently. The group has also dispersed. Webb

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8. Wilson Mathew, **The Rabbit Tetralogy: From Solitude to Society to Solitude Again**, *Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol 37, No. 1, Spring 1991. p. 17.

9. *Rabbit is Rich*, op.cit.

Murkett and Cindy took divorce, Thalma's lupus got more serious mounting up their medical expenses, consequently the Harrisons had to withdraw their membership, and Buddy Inglefinger got married and moved to some other place. Moreover, Harry dislikes the young lot that has taken the place of the old at the club.

His social world being dissolved, he feebly attempts to reconstruct it in Florida by playing golf with other semi-retired people staying in the condominium; but he feels himself as an outsider. Harry notices that everyone in Florida is 'cautious, as if on two beers they might fall down and break a hip'[10] a caution due to old age, but also a caution among his golf partners due to cultural difference. Harry's three other partners are Jews, and he feels the same uneasiness in their company as he felt with blacks in *Rabbit Redux* before meeting Skeeter.

Harry's marginalisation comes at the family front as well. While Nelson and Janice take important family and business decisions, he is kept unaware of the dealings. In the end, Harry flees away from his home like his first flight in *Rabbit, Run*. While thirty years back, his world was shattered by his running,

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10. *Rabbit at Rest, p.* 70

this time nothing happens. The family continues functioning in his absence even Janice doesn't bother to call him for weeks, and Harry painfully discovers that the prelude to death is inconsequentiality. This sense of isolation is accompanied by a problem of identity. For more than ten years Rabbit's social status and identity have been appended to Janice's family name and wealth. The people of Brewer now remember him not because of his high school stardom but because he is the son-in-law of Fred Springer, manager of Toyata agency. As he converses to Thelma with whom he has carried on a ten years affair, "The reason I never left Janice and never can is, without her, I'm shit. I'm unemployable I'm too old. All I can be from here on is her husband."[11]

Harry's feeling of loss is also contributed by his failure to find the possibility of escape in sex. Now that his powers have collapsed he can only see its sad futility. Having diminished expectations in general, his relationship with Janice is reduced almost to the level of negligibility. He even breaks his ten year old affair with Thelma after his first heart attack; in part because he is feeling physically fragile.

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11. Ibid., p. 207.

As Brooke Horvath[12] has argued about the first three Rabbit novels, *Rabbit at Rest* enacts the consequences of Harry's failure as an erotic quester, as he is now disgusted by the wonders he expected throughout his life. In one of his reviews, Updike discusses the western love myth, ' her concern is not with the possession, through love, of another person but with the prolongation of the lover's state of mind. Eros is allied with Thanatos rather than Agape; love becomes not a way of accepting and entering the world but a way of defying and escaping it'.[13] For Harry eros has always been allied to Thanatos, as in *Rabbit, Run* Ruth calls him 'Mr. Death'. Eros has always been a way of escaping the world; whether it was in the pursuit of transcendence manifested in the perfect tee shot, or for escaping a world that has deteriorated into materialism, constrictions and insignificance. The only incidence of the novel that doesn't fall in the same perspective is when Harry makes love to his daughter-in -law Pru. Pru seems to him 'a piece of paradise blundered upon, incredible.'[14]

12. Horvath Brooke, **The Failure of Erotic Questing in John Updike's Rabbit Novels**, *Denver Quarterly* Vol. 23, no.2, 1988. p.70.89.

13. Updike John, **More Love in the Western World**, *Assorted Proxe*, New York, Alfred A Knopf, 1970. p. 285.

14. *Rabbit at Rest* p. 346.

For Harry, adultery with daughter-in-law does not amount to transgressing the social code. In fact, this is the only adultery where eros is not a mode of escape for him rather 'accepting and entering' the world, as Harry compares Pru to pear trees in blossom, that he notices while driving through Brewer.

Ralph Wood says that if we take into account Harry's journey from *Rabbit, Run*, he can hardly be said to have made progress. He says, '*Rabbit at Rest* is riveting. It lets us roam backward into the fields of Harry's youth even as it drags us inexorably to his death'[15] *Rabbit at Rest* is marked by Harry's strong nostalgia for the past. Harry recalls the myriad events, people and places that shaped his life. In fact the novel is as much about the past as it is about present. Everything current is connected to something distant. Hence Rabbit constantly remembers his past: his fading stardom as a highschool basket ball hero, his marriage to Janice, the deaths that each of them brought about in their own house, their friends, Harry's job as a typesetter and car dealer.

There is an air of acceptance in the novel as Janice says of Harry, "He had a hard time when

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15. Wood, Ralph C., **Rabbit Runs Down,** *The Christian Century,* Nov 21-28, 1990, p. 1099.

we were younger giving up his dreams and his freedom but he seems at peace now[16]. Harry is not only at peace but he also tries to make up for his past mistakes. He saves his grand daughter Judy from drowning when they go sunfishing perhaps reminded of the death of his own daughter in *Rabbit, Run* for which he still feels guilty. And in the process of saving her, suffers his first heart attack.

His present feelings sometimes surprise him. Early in the novel he envies the wives of his Jewish golf partners, but later on in the novel when he visits Florida alone, an elder woman is friendly to him. He feels that she has been 'invading him (so) he takes two nitrostats to quell his heart'[17] This fear of invasion typifies Harry's social relations and even he realises that his present feelings are almost a complete contradiction of what he has desired through most of his life; 'there was a time, when he was younger, when the thought of any change, even a disaster gladdened his heart with the possibility of a shake up, of his world made new. But at present he is aware mostly of a fluttering, binding physical resistance within him to the idea of being uprooted'[18] Harry is,

16. *Rabbit at Rest,* p. 145.

17. Ibid., p. 489.

18. Ibid., p. 429.

in fact, bewildered by the changes in American society all around him. Janice has suitably adapted herself to the changing set up leaving Harry out of step. She is more at home in America than Harry.

Harry, however, still retains some of his primary urges and impulses of his youth. Although he nostalgically reminiscences about his past, he has a determination to live for the present. He realises that he is a man in rapid demise, but he tries to face his death with this determination. We still find him moving forward in present tense narration that Updike pioneered in *Rabbit, Run*. Also at the start of the first novel, he is running toward what he perceives to be life, at the conclusion of the last one he is running again, this time toward his burrow in Florida, in which instinct tells him he is to find death. But in *Rabbit at Rest,* he not only runs but also reflects and judges.

He still runs a fear of being tied down. Nelson rightly judges him when he says, "I keep trying to love you, but you don't really want it. You have been scared all your life of being tied down."[19] He himself realises the contrast between his spirit, his self and his visible personality. 'Though his inner sense of himself is of an innocuous passive spirit, a steady

19. Ibid., p. 418.

small voice, that doesn't want to do any harm, get trapped anywhere, or even die, there is this another self seen from outside, a six foot three athlete ..., a shameless consumer of gasoline, electricity, newspapers, hydrocarbons, carbohydrates.'[20]

Harry's first encounter with death brings unexpected changes in his character, After having 'the actual taste of it (death) in (his) mouth'[21] he becomes more reflective and sees the world in a new light as if an additional dimension has been added to it. Driving around Brewer, he is struck by the beauty of the spring and also observes the streets and society as a whole have undergone a remarkable change. It is as if till now he was in a stupor and is now awake with a new consciousness. Janice rightly says 'You see differently now'.[22] His new angle of vision and his new receptivity allow him to enter and accept. Harry also becomes a kind of historian, replete with a historical consciousness of personal, regional and national past.

Toward the end, when Harry plays basketball with boys, one of them calls 'Hey man, you're history'[23].

20. Ibid., p. 247.
21. Ibid., p. 218.
22. Ibid., p. 183.
23. Ibid., p. 491.

In the sense of that taunt, Harry is superannuated, past, irrelevant and to be dismissed contemptuously. On the other hand, he is not without value, as is revealed in the Mt judge fourth of July parade. Harry dresses up as Uncle Sam in the parade, a figurative embodiment of America. As people in the crowd recognize him calling him as 'hotshot,' as former basketball hero, even calling his nickname, Harry recalls a part of himself he had thought to be irrecoverable — his public identity. At a time when his personal identity has got hazy, this is a great boost to his self esteem.

At the end of the parade his personal and mythical identities merge 'Harry's eyes burn and the impression giddily as if he had been lifted up to survey all human history grows upon him, that all in all this is the happiest country the world has ever seen.'[24] Although this development of a historical consciousness might seem to be at odds with his social isolation, may be he finds a consolation for his isolation and approaching death in the contemplation of history. He sees himself as an object of history. Admittedly he is as isolated and as much an outsider in *Rabbit at Rest* as he was in *Rabbit, Run*, but he is aware of having a role in history, a standing in his times

24. Ibid., p. 371.

and culture. Dilvo Ristoff argues that the emphasis in Rabbit novels on social entrapment makes him 'a creature of his time and place, a representative man rather than an eccentric freak'.[25] In the course of the novel, he is often reminded of his status of being retired, of belonging to past, and thus of his marginalisation in the present society. When he comes to manage Springer Motors in Nelson's absence, he realizes that in 'terms of Springer Motors he has become a historian'.[26] He is also conscious of the history of the region where he grew up, regretting all the current changes. But the most surprising sign of Harry's historical consciousness is his reading of history. In the previous novel he only read *Consumer Reports*, but now he reads history which has 'always interested him, that sinister mulch of facts our little lives grow out of before joining the mulch themselves, the fragile brown rotting layer of previous deaths'.[27] Updike himself has pointed out that his awareness of history makes him even more aware of his marginalization. The author has also drawn attention to a close connection between Rabbit and the historical

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25. Ristoff, Dilvo, *The Presence of Contemporary America in Rabbit Trilogy*, New York, Lang, 1988, p. 145.

26. *Rabbit at Rest*, p. 213

27. Ibid., p. 44.

situation that in a way shaped him: 'His sense of being useless, of being pushed to one side by his wife and son, has this political dimension, then. Like me, he has lived his adult life in the context of the cold war. He was in the army, ready to go to Korea, hawkish on Vietnam, proud of the moonshot, and in some sense always justified, at the back of his mind, by a concept of freedom, of America, that took sharpness from contrast with communism. If that contrast is gone, then that's another reason to put him, regretfully to rest in 1990.'[28] This underlines how the author felt the Rabbit quarted to be rooted in the American history of thirty years preceding 1990. Rabbit although unaware of contemporary history in the first novel was a product of that historical moment.

Along with Harry's reconciliation of his position within his milieu, the main plot involves a domestic crisis; the problem of Harry's difficulty to handle son Nelson. We meet him as a young man in *Rabbit Is Rich* as selfish and irresponsible, an embodiment of the 'me generation' kids. In *Rabbit at Rest* he is a full fledged cocaine addict, selling used cars at a cash discount in order to finance his addiction. If he

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28. Updike John, **Why Rabbit Had To Go,** p. 27.

goes down, Springer Motors goes down with him posing a question of loyalty for Janice between her son and father who set up the business. Harry is little concerned with the fate of either, as nursing his dying heart and still eating forbidden foods, he is willing to see everything go so long as he remains. Harry dislikes Nelson, and in his accusations remembers that he himself has hardly ever been a moral exemplar. Nelson is like his father—repeats the same mistakes--vagrancy and irresponsibility and also egomamia. But Nelson's problem is satisfactorily sorted out as he is sent to a rehabilitation center for curing his drug addiction. Three months later Nelson comes out as entirely different person much calm and balanced, ready even to talk through his father's fling with Pru. He now speaks in a forebearing and holy voice of 'processing' and 'talking through'. When Toyota withdraws its dealership license to Springer Motors, he even plans to open a rehabilitation center at the lot and become a social worker. The changes that come in Nelson and Janice leave Harry completely out of tune.

Ralph Wood, however, holds that 'the generations do not progress so much as stay in the same place. We do not see further than our forebears because we are not mounted on their shoulders. All the forward

fury is, in fact, a way of standing still'[29]. The case might hold some truth for Harry as his life indeed goes around in a circle. He has his fatal heart attack at the same place where we meet him three decades ago; trying one final time to win on the basketball court. But Nelson indeed moves on especially after his coming back from Rehabilitation center. He begins a new family life with Pru, which is further consolidated by their planning to have another child.

Harry, however, does not outgrow his rabbity attitude of responding to a crisis. After Pru reveals their encounter to Nelson and Janice, Janice lists his latest infidelty as unforgivable. She labels Harry's behaviour as perverted and monstrous. His wife's vehement reaction of moral outrage and the fact that he was required to talk about it to the family drives him back to his elementary, intuitive response--he runs. Instead of joining the family at Nelson's house, he leaves for Florida and finishes his journey that he began thirty years before. Ending his life in almost complete social isolation in their condominium in Florida, he takes solitary walks around Deleon and plays basketball twice. The game is an echo of his basketball games in *Rabbit, Run* and it is here on the

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29. Wood, Ralph, Op.cit., p. 1100.

basketaball court that he collapses in a major heart attack. Later in the hospital Dr Olman says that even if he survives "he would never be alive the way he was."[30] The fact is that Harry has not been alive the way he was since he passed out of the high school. As Janice reflects he was already drifting downhill when she got to know him in Kroll's store.

Harry's decline in the novel symbolically stands for the decline of American power as well. The novel is set in the final year of Regan's anesthetized rule 'everything falling apart, airplanes, bridges, eight years . . . of nobody minding the store, making money out of nothing, running up debt, trusting in God'. George Searles in his review says that 'Harry's thwarted strivings are on one level simply metaphors for the larger social problems of his era,'[32] and *Rabbit at Rest* 'is a documentary of a society sinking in its own vulgar excesses, just as Harry himself nearly drowns early in the book.'[33]

Harry symbolically stands for the American society as a whole as he is every man. Although some critics

30. *Rabbit at Rest*. p. 510.

31. Ibid., p. 38.

32. Searles, George, **Angst up to the End**, *New Leader*, Vol. 73:13, Oct. 1-15, 90, p. 21.

33. Ibid., p. 34.

like Gary Wills criticize Harry for being an extremely shallow character, Harry retains his identity of the common man. Ralph Wood places him in the right context as 'the average shallow man, the American Adam, the carnally minded creature whom our moralistic religion and politics cannot encompass'.[34] Harry is like all of us who feel hemmed in sometimes, vaguely threatened, subject to whims of the fortune. We all yearn for certain cherished people, and places of our past like Harry. But what sets him apart is his refusal to accept the heaviness of ordinary day to day existence. Throughout the tetralogy, we find him against social contract, now he is tilting against mortality itself. Although he fails in the end, what remains important is that he does not give up gently.

Updike is sometimes called the chronicler of American culture as the quartet covers the social history of America through thirty years. As Ralph Wood says,'In letting us join Rabbit's scurrying life, Updike enables us to absorb the ethos of our time, to breathe the air of our distinctively American culture'.[35] Updike himself gives an epitaph for Rabbit, "Here lies an American man".

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34. Wood. Ralph, p. 1099.

35. Ibid.

Narrative in *Rabbit at Rest* is mostly interior monologue. The narrative voice is in fact a mix of Harry's and Updike's, speaking always in the present. Although the story is told from the authors all knowing point of view, whole passages can be read as Harry's monologues. Thus Updike is able to maintain the character's autonomy of revelation without sacrificing the advantages of authorial omniscience. As Anita Brookner sums up the novel, 'The Rabbit novels, all four of them impress with the fullness of the life they contain, none of it distinguished or exemplary, but in fact memorable and astonishingly complete'.[36] There is a satisfying sense of Harry's life coming to full circle. Updike does not impose any values or moral sense of his novel and characters. Has Harry's life been worthless as he thinks? The question remains unanswered. Harry is faced inescapably by the fact of 'life's constant depreciation' But there's nobody there in the novel to confirm or deny such axioms. The questions remain as a 'moral debate' with the readers, who can only answer them.

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36. Brookner, Anita, **Ending the Heartache**, *The Spectator*, 27 Oct 190, p. 28.

Chapter-6

THE RABBIT QUARTET IN RELATION TO UPDIKE'S OTHER NOVELS AND STORIES

Structurally, each of Updike's novels marks a departure from its predecessor. But his motifs have not substantially changed. Updike essentially deals with middle class American characters and milieu as he believes that 'It is in the middle that extremes clash, where ambiguity restlessly rules. Something quite intricate and fierce occurs in homes and it seems to me without doubt worthwhile to examine.'[1] Updike's characters live in the same society, face the same kind of problems and try to face their predicament in their own way, however, their instincts and responses are not distinctly individualized. This factor leads some critics to conclude that one stereotyped character appears again and again in his fiction.

Updike's early novels and short stories have striking parallels. A few short stories provide clues which are later on elaborately developed in the framework of a novel. The stories and novels together reveal one distinct phase of Updike's involvement

1. Howard, Jane, **Can A Nice Novelist Finish First** *Life*, 4 Nov 1966, p. 74-86.

with themes of family life. It is a phase which began with the *Olinger Stories*[2] and which follows a single narrator in slightly different guises through his adolescence, marriage and divorce.

Starting from his second novel *Rabbit, Run*, we find one familiar Updikean figure in various short stories and novels. He is an outsider in the sense that as a unique individual he cannot find his place in established social coteries. A character with whom Updike identifies and for whom he says in the foreword to *Olinger Stories*, 'He wears different names and his circumstances vary, but he is at bottom the same boy, a local boy.... The locality is that of Olinger, Pennsylvania... audibly a shadow of Shillington.'[3] In many ways this character is typical of the characters created by contemporary American novelists like James Baldwin and J.D. Salinger whose true subject is the recurrent search for personal identity and freedom in the complex society of Post World War II.

The tension in Updike's early fiction derives from the conflict between the illusions of the past

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2. Updike, John *Olinger Stories*, New York, Vintage Books, 1954.

3. Foreword, Ibid.

and the demand made on the protagonist as a parent and husband in the present. His childhood hopes, desires and dreams are frustrated by family life and he is always turning back to rediscover his childhood's glory. Many autobiographcial strands in Updike's fiction are quite obvious. In the early Olinger stories, during narrator's boyhood, he is subject to the expectations of disappointed, hardworking adults. He is a sensitive and gifted child and is particularly sensitive to the small conflicts of the adults. From the start, the boy is conscious of his mother's urging him to take advantage of his gifts, to break free and to escape the fate she has suffered. In *Flight*[4] the mother urges her high school son to flee the constraints of a small town, so that he could forge ahead. The son's affair with local girl is seen as detrimental to his progress.

The dominating mother figure recurs throughout Updike's fiction. In *Of the Farm*[5], the mother is instrumental in spoiling Joey Robinson's first marriage. She considers her son gifted and never forgives him to choose a career contrary to her wishes. When he

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4. Ibid.

5. Updike John, *Of the Farm*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1965.

visits his mother after his wedding, he is so much under her influence that he sees his new wife through his mother's eyes. Similarly, Rabbit's mother in the first novel pampers and nurtures his ego. She could never approve of Janice and even holds her responsible for her son's anti-climatic life. Despite her being ill and bed ridden in *Rabbit Redux*, she consistently urges her son to free himself from his constricting marriage. Similarly the narrator of the short stories attaches himself to the mother's unconscious demands. In *Museums and Women* he says that 'the motion that brought us again and again to the museum was an agitated one, that she was pointing me through these corridors toward a radiant place she had despaired of reaching'[6]. The mother aims for a destination that she vaguely senses can be reached through art. The younger characters too have a feeling that they are ordained with extraordinary power and hence destined for something vaguely special. But for them job is not of prime importance; the primary task is self awareness. They utilise their special gift to know the meaning of life.

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6. Updike John, *Museums And Women And Other Stories*. New York, Alfred Knopf. 1972.

Once the protagonist becomes a father, his interest in his own father begins to increase, if not actually to shift from his mother. In other words, the closer he comes to his father, the more he is conscious of his responsibility - the more trapped he feels. Rabbit sees his father as an ordinary man trudging to make the two ends meet. One of the reasons for his running away was that he feared growing up like his father. The father figure who represents virtue and hard work recurs in *Of the Farm* where Joey is conscious of his father being dominated by his mother. *The Centaur*[7] reveals a father who plods away his life in a profession he hates and sacrifices his life for his son.

Updike's later fiction deals with the male protagonist's family life and domestic troubles. For the protagonist, women are the carriers of the mystery within which meaning may lie.After being trapped, he is faced with a moral dilemma. In order to ease personal troubles, he begins to be unfaithful, though at first this does not involve him in any real conflict. Real trouble, however, begins, when he falls in love. He is torn between wife and mistress

7. Updike John, *The Centaur*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1969.

best illustrated by the behaviour of Jerry Conant and Piet Hanema. His mistress and the love they share offer him the chance to become the author of his own happiness. For a long time he remains indecisive. Slowly he pulls away from his marriage. The overpowering magical fulfilment his mother urged him toward, becomes sexual contentment. He chooses the path his mother wanted for him, the road to a happier life, at the same time he goes against the example set for him by his father.

The prime occupation of Updike's characters is a search for identity in an oppressing milieu. There is a preoccupation with the gropings of the sensitive individual engaged in a struggle to penetrate and impose meaning upon the flux of his experience. The theme of identity is projected in the very first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*[8]. There is a deep rooted antagonism in the inmates for the new prefect Conner. A humanist, Conner seeks to make their life better and comfortable, whereas what they seek is spiritual solace. The efforts made by Conner are viewed as a threat to their identity by the old people. In the course of the novel, a central character

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8. Updike John, *The Poorhouse Fair*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1959.

Gregg, is enraged by the prefect's use of name tags to assign the inmates' chairs which they had not customarily used and this protest permeates the book as it is evidenced most pointedly by the old inmates' constant attempt to retain their individual identities in the face of senility, total dependency and imminent death.

The theme is given an elaborate treatment in the second novel *Rabbit, Run* A 26 year old youth, for whom life had hitherto been an ascension to star status, faces a downward plunge after highschool, when he discovers to his dismay that the society refuses to accord him special status. The constraints of society are stronger once he is married and becomes a father. The secondratedness of his existence is not acceptable to him as he is conscious of his uniqueness and hence sets out to discover his identity. The Rabbit quartet is in fact a record of his frantic attempts to relocate his own identity. *Rabbit Redux* reveals him somewhat settled in his mediocre existence, but the search of a valid identity in the tumultous times has not pacified. His own powers having been elapsed and enfeebled, he now views America as powerful and invincible and attaches himself to the system that he had earlier despised.

The identity of the nation becomes his own as it, in a way, nurtures his ego. By the time of *Rabbit is Rich* he is no more in revolt against society as he has merged with the complacent upper middle class America. However, he realises that his social position as the manager of Toyota Motors, is dependent upon Janice, and he confesses at one point that without his wife he is a nobody. The comfort, and the rich status are not of his own making. In *Rabbit at Rest*, he is almost reduced to the position from where he started. His job is now held by his son; he leads a retired existence. Having been disassociated with his working and social circle, he leads a marginalised life. He is an alien in his own home, the fact which constantly nags him.

The Centaur was originally conceived as a companion piece to *Rabbit, Run*. Its hero George Caldwell, is in some respects merely an older and slightly more conventional Harry Angstrom, both men had once excelled as athletes, and both are enmeshed in a narrowly circumscribed world which repeatedly diverges from the principles they value. Updike has chosen to represent this stultifying middle class world by a small, mid state Pennsylvania town. While Rabbit defends his values by running, George

Caldwell maintains his intentions in the face of a hostile reality by retreating into a mythological kingdom in which Olinger, Pennsylvania, becomes Olympus. George's experiences are almost wholly psychological, but like Rabbit's they constitute a significant rebellion against the meaninglessness of life. George is deeply disturbed by the conventional problems of security and middle age, money, parental responsibility, time and death. He has a philosopher's questing mind and confronts strangers with questions about the meaning of life and death and man's role in all. Peter, Caldwell's son has a passion for Vermeer and grows up to become a painter.

Updike has drawn upon a Greek myth to mould Caldwell's story. George is modelled after Chiron who commits suicide for his son Peter, who represents Prometheus. The story is set fifteen years back — Peter recalls the period involving the major action of the book, the time embracing his father's death during the son's adolescence. Peter's reminiscence is, in fact, an attempt to account for the effect of the past on his present identity. The story is concerned with Peter's quest for identity and individuality - a quest enforced by Caldwell's sacrifice.

In *Of the Farm*, the focus is on the spiritual quest of the character for self identity. The farm around which the story moves is associated with the figure of the mother. Mrs. Robinson cannot bear to give up the farm because it has been in her family for several generations and has its rich legacy of human associations. To lose it would be for her to lose her identity. Similarly Joey Robinson is striving to glean identity and self perspective in his frequent nostalgic recollections of the past and his present vocation.

Updike's heroes often express a nostalgia for the past. The modern world as Updike sees is a world of the superlative and the superfluous but not a world of fulfillment. The stories and novels are, in a way, mere delicate restatements of the great current theme of isolation, millions of throbbing souls seeking fulfillment, identity and happiness. In his short story *Toward Evening*[9], Rafe, another of the Updike's unfilfilled young moderns, is described as riding the bus up Broadway. Outside the windows numbers on the buidings begin to assume historical significance. The present is a blank and the future

9. Updike John, *The Same Door*, London, Andre Deutsch, 1957.

holds forth only 'a boring progressive edifice' like the poorhouse. In such a world scant room exists for the hero. In *The Astronomers*[10], the unnamed protagonist states 'what is past, after all, but a vast sheet of darkness in which a few moments pricked apparently at random shine'. And Updike continues to revert to the past as if some innocence or something untainted by civilization somehow shone in those primeval years.

In *The Persistence of Desire*[11], a young man quite like Peter Caldwell, returns to Olinger to see his eye doctor, and finds himself in the doctor's waiting room with his high school girl friend. They are both now married, but he cannot resist the desire that comes flooding back with memory and he begins to woo her again. "Aren't you happy"? the girl asks and the young man replies :"I am, I am, but' -- the rest was so purely inspired, its utterance only grazed his lips -- "happiness isn't everything". When he comes out of the doctor's office, his eyes dilated and unfocussed from the drops the doctor has used in checking his vision, the girl is waiting

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10. Updike John, *Pigeon Feathers And Other Stories*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1962.

11. Ibid.

for him. She slips a note into the pocket of his shirt. He cannot focus his eyes to read it, but in his shirt pocket it 'made a shield for his heart. In this armor he stepped into the familiar street. The maples, macadam, houses, cement, were to his violated eyes as brilliant as a scene remembered; he becomes a child again in this town, where life was a distant adventure, a rumour, an always imminent joy'.

The hero of *Flight* remembers with minute psychological realism a high school love affair with a very similar girl and builds up around their story a world of remembered details of his grandmother and grandfather, his mother's shocking jealousy of the girl, the high school debates and dances of his country. It is a loving and meticulous recreation of the past, Updike's mind probes it deeply. Even the knowledge that the past is not a shelter from lifelessness, as it now seems to be, comes to him in a story called *A Sense of Shelter*[12] as a memory. What he remembers is how he achieved the courage to tell the most mature and mysterious of his high school classmates that he loved her, only to discover that she was having a bitterly unhappy affair with

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12. *Olinger Storeis*, Op.cit.

an older man. ' "You never loved anybody", she said, "You don't know what it is". He knows now that she was right -- after all, it was just a disposition of his heart, nothing permanent or expensive, as true in a sense more terrible he could have imagined'.

Again in *Archangel* there are 'certain moments, remembered or imagined, of childhood'.[13] The entire story is a hymn to God, an apotheosis of worship; but inserted within the hymn the one sentence fragment seemingly out of place. The escape to the past is paramount. Updike's present is not an enjoyable one. His characters usually are hard pressed in just living life. It is only when his characters revert to the past or to the after life that some sort of salvation or redemption is found. Part of Harry's problem was his preoccupation with what he has been. His difficulty in adjusting to the present is because the present is not the road to fame and prominence. He finds marriage and reality of the present crushing. Richard Gilman in *The Youth of an Author* sees Updike's use of the past as a weakness. '... we find an obsessive fixation upon the past, a compulsive rehearsal of the data of adolescence

13. *Pigeon Feathers*, p. 119.

and young manhood, a cult of the family and of victimized sensibility a spinning out of a legend of quest and initiation' in which rococo states of consciousness and refined conditions of memory come more and more to replace imaginative event and action'.[14] But Updike moves his characters from present to past to future to show the effect of these dissimilar areas on their thought and action.

The novels too, like the short stories, portray young as well as old protagonists showing a nostalgic affinity with the past. *The Poorhouse Fair* at first glance seems different as the young hero has been replaced by a group of old people unified in their hostility toward the scientific minded director of their poorhouse. The identity which the younger generation seeks from the fulfillment of a public role, the poor effortlessly attain through their recollections of the past. Their indiscriminated memories, bitter as well as fond, not only arm them against the intrusions of the harsh outsiders but also define them. Nostalgia here provides a reality beyond the moment. Time is often a terror to those who must look to the future, but it is a comfort to those

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14. Gilman, Richard, **The Youth of An Author** *The New Republic*, 148, April, 1963, p. 25-27.

who have no future, it ties them to something larger than themselves -- their past. In *Of the Farm* Joey's visit to the farm makes him nostalgic about his ex-wife and children, and the memories of his boyhood and his father make him conscious of his family identity and his roots. Similarly in *The Centaur*, Peter, the narrator of the story, recalls his past life with a view to seek fulfillment and self identity and reconstruct his present life which was in a disappointing state.

Along with the identity crisis, the characters in Updike's fiction find their jobs to be terribly tiring and enervating, and work, whether it is teaching or selling or carpentry, provides no positive source for the characters in their efforts to establish themselves before some threat or to formulate an answer to some problem. Even the pastors in his novels and short stories do not seem confident about what their jobs ask them to do. From the inmates of the poorhouse, who have no place of their own and no work, to Rabbit Angstrom both in *Rabbit, Run* and *Rabbit Redux*, Joey Robinson, Piet Hanema in *Couples*[15], we find characters who must do work they

15. Updike, John, *Couples*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1968.

dislike and work that humiliates them, or who can no longer do the kind of work they once did and enjoyed, or who run away from their work. Work suggests more than a person's job; it suggests the whole range of responsibilities which a person feels are pressed upon him, including his relation to his family and friends. It raises the question of personal integrity, of unity between what a person is and what he does.

The problem of vocation arises from the relation of the personal to the public, the internal to the external, or the psychological to the sociological. The problem is acute in Updike's fiction because his narrators and charaters are very sensitive, often almost delicate, as they have a strong sense of their individuality or uniqueness and as they find the world outside of themselves dull, confused and threatening. They share with Updike his own strong sense of individual importance, the mystery of the self; as he puts it in an autobiographical essay; 'why was I I?' The arbitrariness of it astounded me, in comparison, nothing was too marvelous'.[16] But they find that the world in which they live do not support, do not feed, the 'I'.

16. Updike John, *Assorted Prose*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1965, p. 182.

At first glance the old people of *The Poorhouse Fair* seem not to share the problem, since they are rejects from the society. But the fact of rejection points to the tension between them and the surrounding society, a society which invades them even in their exile chiefly represented by Conner. The problem of vocation illustrated by the difference in spiritual , psychological life and sociological life is also illustrated by the spiritual and humanistic approach to life. Conner's humanism as opposed to the inmates' spiritual beliefs accounts for their main problem.

Like Ace Anderson in *Ace in the Hole*,[17] Rabbit in the first novel cannot overcome the burdens of his offices as husband, father and kitchen gadget demonstrator. Unnerved by his confining situation, he runs to break loose, as he once did on the basketball court. But the basketball model is inadequate. His opponents on the basketball court were identifiable, but in real life the enemy is poverty, boredom and a series of meaningless jobs. Eccles, too, in the novel faces the same problem. According to his wife Lucy,. he is an inadequate father to his children, and according to Kruppenbach,

17. *The Same Door*. Op.cit.

no pastor to his flock. In his office as priest, he lays less emphasis on the faith in God than on the humanitarian aspects of work. He is more interested in the social service of reconciling Rabbit back to his family.

In the short stories of *The Same Door* the problem of vocation occurs in the form of relation of a sensitive boy to the hostile world around him, as in *Friends from Philadelphia, The Alligators* and *The Happiest I've been.* The problem of the taxing nature of the offices of young husband and father is portrayed in *Toward Evening, Sunday Teasing,* and *Incest.* Some specific jobs reflect the problem like teaching in *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and So Forth* and the artist's life in *A Gift From the City.*

The Centaur discloses the frustration and plight that arises out of George's dislike of his occupation. His predicament is that he is compelled to teach which is the only way of supporting his family. His son Peter grows up to become an expressionist painter, which he has always dreamt of becoming, but lacks a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment. Joey Robinson, an advertising specialist, realises on visiting his farm that how much that was of value has slipped

away from his life when it is juxtaposed to its origins. He encounters the integrity and trustfulness of his mother and his own poetic youth. *Rabbit Redux* opens with Rabbit engaged, though more responsibly, in yet another demeaning and draining job. Piet Hanema in *Couples* is a man of artistic imagination, who feels trapped by his work.

Updike's later fiction in the nineteen sixties and seventies reveals a shift in his focus. Search for identity, nostalgia for the past and other motifs have been replaced by a more consistent motif of marriage and adultery. This was the period when his own marriage was disintegrating and moving towards divorce. In his fiction the problem of individuality and freedom, personal identity and social constraints are considered through the motif of marriage. In the next two books *The Music School*[18] and *Couples* we find Updike in transition. Although a few of the stories collected in *The Music School* go back to youth and the early years of marriage, Updike spends most of his time in both books with the bitter dregs of marriage on the rocks.

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18. Updike John, *The Music School*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1966.

The characters in the short stories are open, lonely and at odds with their world, as in *The Dark*, *The Morning*, *The Hermit*, *At a Bar in Charlotte Amalie*, *The Family Meadow* and *The Bulgarian Poetess*. Loneliness is mixed with marital troubles in *Leaves*, *The Stare*, *Avec la Bebe-Sitter*, *Twin Beds in Rome*, *My Lover Has Dirty Nails*, *The Rescue*, and *The Music School*. Loneliness and marital difficulties seem to be related to the move Updike's fiction makes from eastern Pennsylvania and youth to New England and Midpoint in life.

Too Far To Go[19] another short story collection deals specifically with the married life and disintegration of Joan and Richard Maple. If *Olinger Stories* projected much of what happens in Updike's early novels, *Too Far To Go* helps one understand his major works that followed. The fate of married men and women in America is central to his novel *Couples*, but even *Rabbit Redux* and *A Month of Sundays*[20] are more heavily dependent upon the subject of sexual relations than the earlier books.

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19. Updike. John, *Too Far To Go: The Maples Stories*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1979.

20. Updike. John, *A Month of Sundays*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1975.

With *Marry me: A Romance*[21], Updike begins what may be the next saga in his fiction — remarriage. Yet the seeds of his full grown interest in marriage and divorce predate even the first Olinger novel, *The Poorhouse Fair*. The earliest of the Maples story *Snowing in Greenwich Village* appeared in *The New Yorker* on 21 January 1956. The Maples are not yet two years married, but already out of interest, as figured by the attractively threatening character, Rebecca. By the fourth story *Twin Beds in Rome* 8 February 1964, Richard and Joan are already discussing separation and even in the two stories in between, Updike's narrator is regretting 'once my ornate words wooed you'.[22]

The attitude of a married man in an early short story *The Persistence of Desire* (reference to which has already been made), when he meets his ex girl friend in a doctor's clinic, he has an onrush of past memories, and tries to woo her. The girl asks him whether he is not happy:"I am, I am, but happiness isn't everything", the statement crystallizes the discontent that perplexes and ambiguously nourishes

21. Updike, John, *Marry Me: A Romance*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1965.

22. *Too Far To Go*, Op. Cit.

all the groping adulteries in Updike's fiction. Most of Updike's characters are incapable of decisive altering acts of choice or will. But they are troubled or distracted by a recurring intuition of incompletion. The chief outward sign of this disease is sexual unrest, but Updike has consistently associated the marital transgression of his characters with metaphysical or religious longings as if to suggest that adulterous cravings in the present rootless era are the confused expression of an instinct for freedom itself, a rebellion against the confinements of age and circumstance.

Since the first Rabbit book, Updike has recorded the filial and sexual entanglements of his characters. One of Rabbit's problems in the first novel is sexual incompatibility with his wife. Although it was not the sole reason for his deserting his family, once he meets Ruth, he achieves a sense of gratification and fulfillment which comes because his relationship with Ruth has a sense of freedom, it is free from the sense of constriction which comes from marriage. Ruth acknowledges his need of a quest for self identity. This theme of adultery as a means of seeking identity and conforming spirituality in a

sterile society, gradually gained momentum in Updike's writings with the publication of *Couples*. Updike observes that in his first novel *The Poorhouse Fair* and in *Couples* he was posing the question, "After Christianity what?" The answer as explored in 'its many permutations' in *Couples* was sex as 'the glue ambience, and motive force of the new humanism',[23] replacing Christianity.

The conflict between marriage and love in Updike's fiction can be explained in the manner of Denis de Rougemont's work *Love in the Western World* in which he explains the romantic behaviour of the West through the myths of Tristan and Isuelt and Don Juan. In the manner of Rougemont's work, Rabbit doubts his own existence and can reaffirm it only in love. However, the very imperfections of the world which have caused his uneasiness refuse to give him an object worthy either of eros or agape. In his review of *Love Declared*, Updike analyzes what is Rabbit's ideal, the love myth whose 'essence is passion itself; her concern is not with the possession, through love, of another person but with the prolongation of the lover's state of mind. Eros is allied with Thanatos rather than Agape, love

23. Quoted from Gerald J. Galgan, **After Christianity what?** *Commonweal*, Vol. 103 No.v 5, 1976, p. 723.

becomes not a way of accepting and entering the world but a way of defying and escaping it. Iseult is the mythical prototype of the unattainable lady to whom the love-myth directs our adoration diverting it from the attainable lady (in legal terms, the "wife") who is at our side'.[24] Love provides courage to man to face the terror of death : 'a man in love, confronting his beloved, seems to be in the presence of his own spirit, his self translated into another mode of being, a form of light greeting him at the gate of salvation. A man in love ceases to fear death'.[25] Updike further states that 'our fundamental anxiety is that we do not exist. Only in being loved do we find external corroboration of the supremely high valuation each ego secretly assigns itself. This exalted arena, then, is above all others the one where men and women will insist upon their freedom to choose — to choose that other being in whose existence their own existence is confirmed and amplified. Against the claims of this mighty self-assertion, the arguments embodied in law and stricture

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24. Updike, John, **More Love in the Western World** *Assorted Prose*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1965, p. 285.

25. Ibid., 286.

for self preservation appear trivial and base. The virtus of the choice is diminished if others would also have chosen it for us. The heart prefers to move against the grain of circumstance; perversity is the soul's very life. Therefore, the enforced and approved bonds of marriage, restricting freedom, weaken love'.[26]

The essay is a remarkable introduction to the mystery of Eros that is dramatized in *Couples*. Piet Hanema is the pivotal character, who is at times Tristan and Don Juan, who represent attitudes toward passion and marriage that abound today. Piet in his Tristan capacity searches for the ideal women who will allay his fear of death and his longing for the infinite, as Don Juan he seeks to conquer many women and thus violate the secret of the infinite hidden in Eros. Promiscuity is a means for Piet to seek meaning in his existence. Piet Hanema is an artist who feels trapped by his work as a carpenter, his marriage to an aloof and angelic woman, the secular town of Tarbox, and despite his despair and promiscuity he is a religious man, quite like Rabbit Angstrom. He too is conscious of a spiritual power in life which had been eluding him and he seeks to

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26. Ibid., p. 299.

redefine grace and spirituality through his various adulterous relationships.

In Updike's fiction, wife is often portrayed as the elusive woman and it is she, not the mistress, who is difficult to win. Angela Hanema, Janice Angstrom, Ruth Conant, Mrs. Marshfield are such wives. Like most of Updike's male heroes, Piet suffers the agony of religious doubt and thus turns to the emergent religion to confirm his sense of self. Guilt, he learns, both lacerates and soothes, and he finds himself balanced between an angelic wife who accepts death as part of the natural cycle and who refuses to have more children and an earthly mistess who is a regular churchgoer and who aborts her pregnancy. Piet's relationship with Georgene early in the novel is tinged with the sense of self identity and with Foxy he experiences a feeling that gives him confidence in himself, yet when their affair is discovered he confesses to his wife "Being with you is Heaven" and later begs "Don't make me leave you -- You're what guards my soul. I'll be damned eternally".[27] Piet Hanema finds it dificult to make a choice between the two. The tension between the two polarities i.e. marriage and adultery works to

27. *Couples*, p. 410.

assure Updike's protagonists that they are alive, that existence is variable. Renunciation of a mistress can seal this sense of being divided, mending the breach between body and soul, but it will extinguish hope in salvation in the process. Wholeness of being and equilibrium are not things that Updike values highly. He said that 'a person who has what he wants, a satisfied person, ceases to be a person. Unfallen Adam is an ape.... I feel that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all -- just an animal with clothes on'.[28]

This dilemna is best illustrated by the attitude of Jerry Conant in *Marry Me*. *Marry Me* which, in fact, precedes the graver documentation of *Couples*. The vague apprehensions and uneasy nights of Jerry Conant evolve into the mortal fears and morally choreographed nightmares of Piet Hanema in *Couples*. One has a Tom Sawyerish bad conscience, the other Kierkegaardian fear and trembling. *Marry Me* tells the story of a baffled husband's rebounding between wife and mistress, responsibility and romance. In this particular case, it reworks the main plot of *Couples*,

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28. Updike, John **One Big Interview**, *Picked up Pieces*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1975, p. 485.

passing over the incidental affairs and surrounding characters so as to focus more purely on the two marriages. The novel emphasizes the destructiveness - especially in its effect on the children -- of Jerry's indecisiveness. Jerry's intermittent guilt, makes things more piquant. For without a sense of danger and the illicit (as Marshfield learns in *A Month of Sunday*) desire wanes. The suffering of the lovers Jerry and Sally provokes their fervour, makes possible the vibrant, almost numinous belief in which their love is founded.

Jerry has to choose between a good woman and woman child, between fatherhood and chivalry. Ruth is cool and unsentimental and seems remote, whereas Sally is near. Ruth is nobody's woman, though she listens where Sally is often heedless. For Ruth, the man and woman go side by side, while with Sally, Jerry feels on top, he shares with Ruth whom he met when they were fellow art students, a mutual admiration, and that is their strength and weakness. Despite her depth of patient mothering sympathy, Ruth has no understanding for Jerry's idea of freedom. A man's responsibility she maintains is to his family. Ruth inherits from her father an impatience with superstition and after her children

are born, she puts religion behind her. Her pragmaticism and domesticity are one with that of Angela Hanema, Joan Maple, Jane Marshfield, Janice Angstrom and others. She is the classic Updikean wife, above all in her humanism -- that is, her reduction of theology to morality, her indifference to ritual, her implicit assumption that man, human society is the measure.

Jerry's dilemma is his difficulty in leaving any of the women "I can't give any of you up".[29] At the end of the novel, Jerry is still uneasily with Ruth, dreaming of the beautiful Sally. By being indecisive, Jerry is being torn between individual and spiritual commitments. He searches for a promise that he will never die. Jerry courts passion and guilt, only by suffering in bed with his mistress does he overcome fear of death with his wife. If he gives up adultery, he faces the stasis of routine boredom, if he abandons his family, he denies the sacrament of marriage, of God.

Beneath Jerry's boyish arrogance beats the heart of Updike's Rabbit Angstrom of *Rabbit, Run* which *Marry Me* foreshadows. Oscillating between his mistress Ruth and wife Janice, he faces Jerry's

29. *Marry Me*, p. 120.

dilemma of choosing one of the two. Janice embodies mediocrity and dullness and staying on with Janice provided no space for his yearning for upward spaces, grace and personal identity. Ruth makes Rabbit feel as alive and competitive as he did on the basketball court. In Janice he faces the death of his freedom, individuality, his sense of uniqueness, quite like Jerry's belief that he is married to his death. Relationship with Ruth is an escape from death and a justification of his own spiritual self. Rabbit faces a similar dilemma in *Rabbit Redux*, where he takes in Jill, a teenage girl in Janice's absence. Despite Janice's disapproval he does not leave her.

Updike's protagonists turn to find faith and a validity of their existence in adulterous sex because the traditional Christianity seems impotent. In *Rabbit, Run* the stained glass window in the church across the street is symbolically darkened. In the end of the novel when amidst present chaos, he looks for help towards the church, he could only see a dark circle in a stone facade. In *Couples* the church burns, and the old spire has to be torn down. The new church building, however, is not to be 'a restoration but a

modern edifice, a parabolic poured concrete tent shape peaked like a breaking wave'.[30] In an early short story *Churchgoing*[31], the protagonist attends a church service on Caribbean Island, but he finds the service dull and meaningless, it's the windows of the building which become figuratively meaningful. Similarly, in *A Month of Sundays*, the Reverend Marshfield writes in his diary that churches 'bore for (him) the same relation to God that billboards did to Coca-Cola: they promoted thirst without quenching it'.[32]

In the wake of loss of traditional Christianity, Upkide's protagonists find their individual ways of investing their otherwise meaningless existence with meaning, and adultery assumes new significance. The question in his marriage centred novels is whether passion can survive marriage. There is no conflict between individual morality and social sanction. Marriage may have the sanction of ceremony, but adultery promises the freedom of desire. For Updike, love is more than a command to procreate the race. A fundamental anxiety in his marriage novels is not

30. *Couples*, p. 478.
31. Updike, John, *Pigeon Feathers*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1962.
32. *A Month of Sundays*, p. 30.

destruction of the race or dismantling of the social harmony but recognition that the individual will die. Love, even adultery saves an individual from existential despair: 'only in being loved do we find external corroboration of the suppremely high valuation each ego secretly assigns itself'.[33] Choosing a lover outside the ceremony is more than insisting on the freedom to choose, it is selecting a partner who through sexual consummation validates the existence of the self. Against the claim of confirming one's life in the face of death, the counter claims of extending the race and protecting social propriety seem petty. Since 'perversity is the soul's very life, the approved bonds of marriage, restricting freedom, weaken love'.[34]

There exists a negative equation between sexual intensity and social approval. Marriage is enforced by the ceremonial side, but confirmation of one's existence requires passion, and passion demands freedom. Love in marriage for Updike promises physical life to the race and spiritual death to the progenitors. Rabbit Angstrom 'feels the truth : the thing that has left his life has left irrevocably, no

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33. Op. cit.

34. Op. cit.

search would recover it. No flight would reach it. It was here, beneath the town, in these smells and these voices, forever behind him. The fullness ends when we give nature her ransom, when we make children for her. Then she is through with us, and we become, first inside, and then outside, junk'. Marriage is shaky but adultery promising when Updike's characters acknowledge Rabbit's dilemma. *Too Far To Go* traces the decline of marriage through transgression toward divorce. The husband and wife resist the final parting, but when it comes, their no fault divorce case resembles their wedding ceremony many years ago. Updike's foreword insists that all things, including marriage, terminate: 'That a marriage ends is less than ideal, but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds. The moral of these stories is that all blessings are mixed'.[35]

Updike's marriage novels usually focus on a male narrator who suffers the tension generated by the conflicts between the illusions that caress him from the past and the demands that lacerate him in the present. Love and hope nourished in his youth become memory and desire pounding in his maturity.

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35. Updike, J., Foreword, *Too Far To Go*.

The teenage flight degenerates to the adult run and the male narrator resorts to adultery and divorce for signs that he still lives. The idea of keeping an individual integrity leads to adultery in Updike. One of the central ironies in Updike's fiction is that promising to love and cherish his wife, the Updike male learns that he does so at risk to the self. Marriage encourages the religious pitfall of despair. Caught between the religiously blessed marriage ceremony and the sin of despair, the transgressor reaches out toward adultery in an effort to rekindle the liveliness he has lost. Rabbit, Piet, Jerry try to create a new life for themselves. Love is always the key to the recreation of the self, but love often conflicts with sacrament. If the protagonist loves the mistress, yet, cannot leave the wife, he turns the imperative to act into the trap of stasis. If he remains with the wife, he hurts both himself and her, if he transgresses with the mistress, he also hurts both, but at least he creates a new promise of happiness. Transgression means both joy and guilt; fidelity means both absolution and death.

The desires of the individual clash with the demands of the society. The adulterer wants both morality and transgression, wife and mistress. In

taking two steps toward divorce and one step back toward marriage, the transgressor exhausts himself as well as his family. Realizing that transgression is action, but fearing for the stainlessness of his soul, Updike's adulterer finds himself vacillating even as he moves to act. But when he realizes that commitment to mistress too can face him with death, he understands that to be totally satisfied is also to be dead. Sexual longing is painful, but pain is a sign that he lives.

Updike has said, "my books are all meant to be moral debates with the reader, and if they seem pointless -- I'm speaking hopefully -- it's because the reader has not been engaged in the debate.The question is usually, "what is a good man?" or "what is goodness"? and in all the books an issue is examined".[36] Confronting his characters with the shadow of cosmic blankness, Updike describes Piet Hanema as a moral man who "can't act for himself because he is overwhelmed by the moral implications of any act leaving his wife, staying with her".[37] Updike's idea of morality is closely related to his religious faith, which is totally different from an idea

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36. *Picked up Pieces*, p. 502.

37. Ibid., p. 503.

of absolute and divinely ordered morality. The religious sensibility Updike and his protagonists follow is the conservative theology of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. Barth views humanism as the enemy of faith, and rejects the modern tendency to domesticate God by interpreting God's tenets in terms of bourgeois ethics. He attacks the self righteousness of humanistic morality and the assumption that a rigorous adherene to moral principles will solve human problems. This is what Reverend Tom Marshfield has in mind when he criticizes his wife's liberalism in *A Month of Sundays*. She is a good person but a slack believer, ethical and soft where Marshfield is Barthian and hard. Such a staunchly conservative theology elevates belief over ethics, revelation over rationalism. Some of these views are echoed by Reverend Kruppenbach in *Rabbit, Run* when he preaches to Reverend Eccles: "... you think your job is to be an unpaid doctor, to run around and plug up holes and make everything smooth.... If Gott wants to end misery He'll declare the kingdom now.... I say you don't know what your role is or you'd be home locked in prayer. There is your role: to make yourself an exemplar of faith.... There is nothing but Christ for us. All the rest, all this decency and busyness, is

nothing. It is Devil's work".[38]

For both Updike and Barth the distinction between the human and the divine is absolute. God is wholly other, unreachable, only God can touch man, but his existence cannot be proved. Thus the religious question involves the question of belief. A true Christian has an absolute faith in the Apostle's Creed. Since Updike's Christianity is determined only by his profession of Apostle's creed, it contains no inherent moral system. Armed with belief, confident that grace can be earned, Updike's male adulterers cause pain but hope to avoid damnation. Although they grieve for the hurt they cause to their families, they nevertheless continue to pursue the unity of flesh and spirit. Marshfield believes not only in God but also in the spiritual worth of the flesh.

The world Updike creates in his fiction seems morally ambiguous as Updike believes in two kinds of morality. One is external, abstract, made up of social and cultural mores and all the percepts our civilization has established to enable men to live together in harmony. But another kind of morality is a response to an inner imperative. This subjective

38. *Rabbit, Run*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1960, p. 305-6.

morality is less a system than a sense of the propriety of an act. In Updike's novels, the dilemma created by this dual morality is often embodied in the women between whom the protagonist must choose. In *Rabbit, Run*, Rabbit oscillates between Ruth and Janice. The external and codified morality, of which Jack Eccles is the chief instrument demands that Rabbit return to Janice, but Rabbit's inner apprehension of what is right for him directs him to Ruth. Similarly, Joey Robinson's dilemma is represented by his two wives, and also by Peggy and his mother. Piet Hanema must choose between Angela and Foxy and Rabbit in *Rabbit Redux* between Jill and Janice. For Tom Marshfield the choice is between wife Jane and first Alicia Crick, then Frankie Harlowe. But Updike believes that "all problems are basically insoluble and that faith is a leap out of total despair".[39] Hence the dilemmas his characters face are insoluble. They reject what is considered 'right' by the society to follow what is 'good' for them.

The question of faith and morality is projected by Updike from his first novel *The Poorhouse Fair*. For John Hook, virtue is contingent upon faith.

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39. Howard, J., p. 80.

Without faith there can be no virtue, for there are no invisible goals to be pursued and served, there is nothing beyond man himself to structure his existence and order his values. Faith alone makes man responsible for his actions, and makes him accountable not to himself or to other men but to God. Thus, as Hook tells Conner at the conclusion of their debate on the existence of God, "There is no goodness without belief. There is only busyness".[40]

In *The Centaur* Updike dramatizes the experience of his 'father's immersion in the world of Christian morality, in trying to do the right thing and constantly sacrificing himself....'[41] In *The Centaur* there is no real moral dilemma. Caldwell believes that to the problems of human existence 'Jesus Christ is the only answer'. But Caldwell's is basically inclined toward that part of Christianity which is ethical and he is immersed in the world of morality. His faith is troubled as he is obsessed with death and fears that it will bring with it a loss of faith as had happened with his priest father.

Rabbit, Run clearly manifests the division between

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40. *The Poorhouse Fair*, p. 116.
41. Rhode, E., **Grabbing dilemmas: John Updike Talks About God, Love and the American Identity**, *Vogue*, 1 Feb, 1971, p. 185.

the ethical and the religious. Rabbit is the only character whose religious sense is in fact spiritual and not simply a part of his existence in a nominally Christian society, yet he is in a sense more moral than other characters. His faith in God is only that it concerns no one other than himself and God, and has no influence on his human relationships. The distinction between the religious and the moral mystifies other characters. At one point Eccles is angry about Rabbit's apparent insensitivity to moral problems: "you don't care about right and wrong; you worship but your own worse instincts".[42] But this is true only in terms of Eccles' ethical humanism. Rabbit is concerned with the morality but he has realized that much of what people and Eccles think right is in fact wrong. Confrontation with this religiously and morally sterile world forces Rabbit to turn inward for guidance. Still he continues to live in the external world, so he is caught between the demand of two moralities -- social and personal. Conforming to the first, he violates the integrity of his subjective existence, but following the second, he creates social havoc and brings suffering to those around him.

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42. *Rabbit, Run*, p. 134.

Updike writes about this moral dilemma, "my books feed, I suppose, on some kind of perverse relish in the fact that there are insolvable problems. There is no reconciliation between the inner intimate appetites and the external consolations of life. There is no way to reconcile these individual wants to the very need of any society to set strict limits and to confine its members. *Rabbit, Run*.... I wrote just to say there is no solution. It is a novel about the bouncing, the oscillating back and forth between these two kinds of urgencies until, eventually, one just gets tired and wears out and dies, and that's the end of the problem".[43]

Updike's later novels dramatize man's moral dilemma through the complexities of sexual love. The ethics of love are determined by subjective morality which Updike defends as valid form of morality. As such they are in opposition to those ethical dicta by which the society regulates the sexual impulse. While Rabbit oscillates between wife and mistress, other protagonists try to make a compromise with each and the inevitable result is a constant sense of guilt and indecisiveness. They are

43. Gado, Frank, *First Person Conversation on Writers and Writing*, Schenectady, Union College Press, 1973, p. 92.

faced with so many conflicting demands that they retreat into passivity. Joey Robinson silently watches when his mother and wife fight over him. In the same way Piet is reduced to passivity by the conflicting demands of love and responsibility. In *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit helplessly stands by as Jill proceeds to her inevitable destruction. Jerry in *Marry Me* fails to take any decision and wants God to show a way out or Ruth to take a decision.

In *A Month of Sundays* the conflict of faith and morality which has been implicit in earlier books is vociferously expressed by Reverened Marshfield. His daily pages written for therapy comprise a meditation on life and love, on sex and morality and faith. A true Barthian figure, he seeks to reconcile body and soul: 'we and our bodies are one... (and) we should not heretically... castigate the body and its dark promptings'.[44] To him 'Ethics is plumbing, necessary but dingy. Ethical passion the hobgoblin of trivial minds. What interest us is not the good but the godly, not living well but living forever'.[45]

Updike's transgressors, therefore, long for grace even while they commit adultery. The natural human

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44. *A Month of Sundays*, p. 135.

45. Ibid., p. 228.

condition is to rebel against the order, to insist on individuality by contrary act, for writes Updike, 'our precious creaturely freedom .... finds self assertion in defiance and existence in sin'.[46] This is the freedom that his protagonists run toward when they abandon their wife for mistress.

In *A Month of Sundays*, *Roger's Version* and *S.* Updike reworks on Howthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. In these novels he has explored the consequences of adultery in the modern American context. *Roger's Version* refers to Roger Chillingworth's version of events. He is a recurring Barthian figure who envisions God as 'wholly other'. He finds Dale's project of finding God through his knowledge of science and computers repulsive, as it describes a God who lets Himself be intellectually trapped, and ethically immoral because it eliminates faith from religion. *Roger's Version* addresses many of the themes and concerns of *A Month of Sundays* -- reparation of the split between body and soul, adultery as a transfiguring experience. Roger had to leave ministry because of an affair with Esther, his present wife (suggesting Tom Marshfield ten years

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46. Updike, John, **Introduction**, *Soundings in Satanism*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972, p. x.

later). Now they have a workable and stagnant marriage. She enters into an extra marital affair with Dale and Lambert acts as an ominiscient narrator.

S. is written from Hester's stance. Sarah deserts her husband to join an ashram in order to search for an enlightenment beyond the privileged but suffocating life she had led in the American upper middle class. She is a pilgrim on a quest to change herself and the world and as such her quest is similar to Rabbit's in the first novel.The novel also exposes the duplicity, hypocrisy of the spiritual community at the ashram and futility of her quest. Her quest fails as she discovers that her old self cannot be fully shed. The focus of the trilogy is the American experiment of dissent, separation and heroic struggle to rebuild, and in each novel, individual selves attempt to shed old skins in an effort toward self transformation.

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The decade of 1950s in American history was characterised by an air of complacency and tranquility, due to the absence of war and a tremendous economic boom and brought in its trail a general disrespect for order, discipline and the value systems which nourished the roots of religion and tradition. The indulgent view of life fostered by the new ideas brought disaster on the society in general and the institutions of religion and marriage in particular. In describing the postwar America of the 1950s, many historians evoke images of the mundane: The gray flannel suit, mass exodus to suburbia, proliferation of television sets into middle class households, and the sterility of family life, all illustrating stagnation and complacency. Alongwith conformity, this brings alienation of the individuals to the society. The literature of this period, therefore, portrays vain struggles of the characters to assert individual identity in the mid-century American culture. Updike successfully illustrates the introspective struggle of the 'silent majority' through Harry Angstrom, the ambivalent non-hero of *Rabbit, Run*. Through themes of religion, physical action and responsibility, John Updike suggests the stuffiness, disillusionment, and ambivalence pervasive in the America of the 1950s struggling as it was to cope with a conformist post-war identity.

Updike's fiction is rooted in the ethos of contemporary America. He is seeking to sculpt the image of an individual, and contines its development through the corpus of his writing. Updike in his each book places his protagonist with a predicament that prompts him to act or respond in a variety of ways. He records these reactions, vis-a-vis the surrounding society. Distilled from his own experiences, the recurrent motifs revolve around the prominent features of the age. Alongwith the individuals' struggle to forge a new identity for himself, religion, humanism, death, domestic problems, a nostalgia for past and the autobiographical links are also the focus of his attention.

Rabbit's predicament is the predicament of an ordinary American who is obsessesed with the dreams of his own specialness. But he discovers, to his dismay, that the specialness is not without reservations. The American middle class has engaged itself into the most unshakeable of complacencies. Rabbit struggles to break free of this complacent society, which is crushing for his spirit. The society, too, rejects him as a nonconformist. In his alienation from the society, his response is to seek new bases of value and order. There is no fixed system or order to guide him, all that he has is himself and his ability

to live. The struggle is not only for an identity but also for new values. His belief in an individual kind of religion and morality are a result of his faith in new values which are dissociated from the society. Rabbit's running is the result of a conscious refusal to lead a disappointed life. His goal is freedom, his weapon choice, and his battleground the self, where the possibilities of freedom may either grow or decay.

Rabbit's return to the constrictions of family and society in the second novel, *Rabbit Redux* is perhaps because he realises that he has to live with public values although they contradict the deepest human instincts. He moves to an acceptance of society's rules. But the acceptance is marked by a resignation to permanent alienation from public values. Although Harry is reintegrated into the society, has a staunch faith in the powers of America; he never gives up his personal values completely. His rebellious spirit never dies, and despite the threats of the society, he insists on keeping Jill and Skeeter in his house. Rabbit's passive rebellion is operative even in the third sequel, *Rabbit is Rich*. Rabbit's struggles against the complacent spirit of the society are a thing of the past, as he himself has become rich and has retired into complacency. His rebellion is dormant, his reintegration into society is complete, his household

is a perfect picture of happiness and prosperity. The concluding novel of the series, *Rabbit at Rest*, portrays Rabbit as an alienated being, not only in society but also in his own house. He is retired and physically degenerated, which is only a sign of his solitude even more isolating than what he experienced in the first novel. His youthful dreams of special identity, individual value and order, have withered. Although he accepts society's laws, society sees him as a reject, a man who can no more contribute to the social order in any way. But he still has a determination to live for the present.

Despite its obsession with the self, Updike's fiction on the whole is not socially irresponsible. His novels insist on a more valid relationship of man with society, on the free assumption of social responsibilities by the self. Because it keeps real alternatives open, this relationship allows for the expansion of human possibilities and for a more meaningful, positive commitment to humanity. The tendency to rely exclusively on the self, the dependence on the individual personality to supplant the institutions, is a result of the inability of the institutions to provide the individuals with a base. Religion is often exposed as insufficient to meet the demands of an individual in the present sterile society.

Rabbit finds the church window in *Rabbit, Run* as dark and unlit. Belief in one's culture and country is also shattered. In *Redux*, the policies of the government regarding Vietnam are criticised. The institution of the family is found lacking in meeting the emotional requirements of an individual.

Harry's urge to run symbolizes the introspective dissatisfaction with American institutions. In the absence of these insittutions that can guide an individual, the individual has to fall back on his resources, and the faith in his individual powers. The course he takes up is disapproved by social standards. In the absence of social and religious inhibitions, sexual promiscuity becomes a part of self-discovery, a substitute for God and law. Updike's characters rebel against their environment, yet they are willing to readjust themselves into the society which rejects them as rebels, but without relinquishing their individualism.

Caught between desire and necessity, Rabbit represents the archetypal American male in search of meaning and self definition. He is Updike's prototypical American character who embodies the fears and hopes, the vices and virtues of his own age. He is the product of the age, shaped by the times, although he does not realise this. Despite his apparent conflict with the society, he is very much a part of

it. Rabbit is only one of the many such characters in real life. His responses comprise, in fact, of the distressing cumulative effect of the society on an individual's psyche. He is a man of action and his running is his own way of coping with the complacency of the times. With maturity, however, his ways of tackling the situation change. In his various interviews, Updike has also pointed out at the autobiographical similarities with Rabbit.

Updike's purpose behind the creation of Rabbit was to portray the life, achievements and downfall of an average middle class American man. By his own profession, Updike seeks to portray the middleness of existences as it is in the middle where extremes clash. Part of Rabbit's appeal to the readers lies in the fact that the reader too might hail from the same social class, same social millieu, engaged in ordinary aspriations and struggles of life.

Although we find Rabbit integrated in society, the conflict between the individual needs and society's demands remains irreconcilable. The quartet offers no solutions to this conflict but only suggests that the conflict is irresolvable.

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